

How “Catholic” Was the Early Nazi Movement? Religion, Race, and Culture in Munich, 1919–1924

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AMONG the more durable tenets of postwar West German historiography was the widespread conviction that Catholicism and Nazism were, at some most basic level, mutually exclusive entities. While a flood of critical studies in the 1960s began to erode this conviction at least around the edges — as scholars subjected to greater scrutiny the actual responses of Catholic opinion leaders, the German episcopate, and the Vatican to the Nazi regime — the image of a fundamental, albeit not quite perfect, incompatibility between Catholicism and Nazism has remained essentially intact to the present day.¹ The durability of this image has been due to some degree to the steady stream of primarily apologetic monographs produced by a large and energetic Catholic scholarly community in Germany, whose works have stressed the heroic oppositional stance and victimhood of the Catholic Church during the Third Reich.² At the same time, a number of more

1. Most recently, the criticisms of Daniel Goldhagen's *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York, 2002) have generated much public discussion, but have added little that is new. The critical reevaluation of the Catholic-Nazi relationship began in earnest with the publication of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, "Der deutsche Katholizismus im Jahre 1933," *Hochland* 53 (1961): 215–39. Important studies that placed the church in an unflattering light soon followed, including Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York, 1964); Carl Amery, *Die Kapitulation, oder Deutscher Katholizismus heute* (Hamburg, 1964); Gordon Zahn, *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (New York, 1964); Klaus Breuning, *Die Vision des Reiches: Deutscher Katholizismus zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur 1929–1934* (Munich, 1969). Debate on the role of Pius XII first reached a wide public with the appearance of Rolf Hochhuth's controversial play *Der Stellvertreter* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1963). For a more sympathetic general interpretation, see Klaus Scholder's classic *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1977).

2. The series *Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte* inaugurated in 1965 by the Catholic publishing house of Grünewald in Mainz and continued by the Schöningh Verlag in Paderborn (which has now reached near-epic proportions — some 140 volumes as of 2002), as well as the activities of the leading German Catholic scholarly society, the *Görres-Gesellschaft* (which publishes the journal *Historisches Jahrbuch*), are some of the more visible manifestations of this productive

objective, statistically-based electoral studies have also established convincingly that Catholic areas tended, even before the Nazis' first national electoral breakthrough in 1930, to be considerably less susceptible to the Nazi appeal than were Protestant regions.³ Indeed, when viewed through the lens of the institutional Church and from the perspective of the 1930s and 1940s, after the Nazi movement already had much history and development behind it (and these are the overwhelming tendencies in the historiographical literature, both critical and apologetic), the antagonistic nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Nazi regime in power is in fact quite striking. This article does not aim to overturn this picture, but rather strives to demonstrate that this antipathy was not universal nor always self-evident. On the contrary, in the Nazi movement's earliest years, when its identity was still fairly fluid and its constituency was still limited primarily to Munich and its environs, an integral role was played within the movement both by Catholic ideals and by Catholic activists, many of whom saw themselves as acting not in contradiction to their religious identities and traditions but specifically in accordance with them. As will be seen, overt Catholic engagement in the early Nazi movement reached an especially high degree of visibility in 1923, before fateful events late in that year and early in 1924 made it considerably more difficult to reconcile Catholic identity with continued participation in the movement.

The literature on the development of the Nazi Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or NSDAP), which is nearly exhaustive in certain respects, is virtually silent on the issue of the movement's confessional makeup or religious identity from the time of its founding in 1919 until individual Nazis and their *völkisch* allies began competing in elections in 1924.⁴ Unfortunately,

Catholic scholarly climate. For an overview of much of this literature see Heinz Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken 1918–1945* (Paderborn, 1992).

3. The definitive study is Jürgen Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991), esp. 169–93. But see also Richard Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, 1982), 38–43, 382–85; Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 112–18, 188–91, 258–61. For an attempt to counter these findings on the basis of an examination of the Black Forest region, see Oded Heilbrunner, *Catholicism, Political Culture, and the Countryside: A Social History of the Nazi Party in South Germany* (Ann Arbor, 1998). On Catholic Bavaria in particular, see Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923–1933* (New York, 1973), 146–83. A critical account that focuses on Munich (although almost entirely on the period after 1933) is Georg Denzler, "Ein Gebetssturm für den Führer: Münchens Katholizismus und der Nationalsozialismus," in *Irlicht im leuchtenden München? Der Nationalsozialismus in der "Hauptstadt der Bewegung,"* ed. F. Prinz and B. Mensing (Regensburg, 1991), 124–53.

4. The term *völkisch*, which connotes a radical racist-nationalist mentality, has no real English equivalent and so will be left in the German throughout. On the early Nazi Party and the surrounding *völkisch* milieu, see Georg Franz-Willing, *Die Hitlerbewegung: Der Ursprung 1919–1922* (Hamburg, 1962); idem, *Krisenjahr der Hitlerbewegung 1923* (Preussisch Ohlendorf, 1974); idem, *Putz und Verbotzeit der Hitlerbewegung, November 1923–Februar 1925* (Preussisch Ohlendorf, 1977); Werner Maser, *Frühgeschichte der NSDAP: Hitlers Weg bis 1924* (Frankfurt am Main, 1965); Reginald Phelps, "Hitler and the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei," *American Historical Review* 68 (1963): 974–86;

while several surviving party membership lists from these early years — containing members' names, addresses, ages, and occupations — have allowed for some instructive analyses of the basic social composition of the early movement, none of the surviving lists provides confessional data.⁵ It is therefore unlikely that a reliable statistically-based account of the movement's confessional makeup during its earliest years will ever emerge. The absence of solid statistical evidence, however, has not hindered the circulation of fairly broad generalizations which, in keeping with the image of the incompatibility of Nazism and Catholicism, typically suggest either that the early ranks of the NSDAP were swelled by bitter apostates and opponents of Christianity or that the bulk of the early movement was drawn primarily from Munich's Protestant minority.⁶

Things looked quite different, however, to contemporary observers in Munich. In October 1923 Heinrich Held, the parliamentary leader of the Bavarian People's Party (Bayerische Volkspartei, or BVP, the party claiming to represent the political interests of the Catholic Church in Bavaria), wrote an

Ernst Deuerlein, "Hitlers Eintritt in die Politik und die Reichswehr," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7 (1959): 177–227; Helmuth Auerbach, "Hitlers politische Lehrjahre und die Münchener Gesellschaft 1919–1923," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 25 (1977): 1–45; and Harold J. Gordon, *Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch* (Princeton, 1973). More recently, see David Clay Large, *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich* (New York, 1997), 123–94; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York, 1998), 129–219; and Anton Joachimsthaler, *Hitlers Weg begann in München 1913–1923* (Munich, 2000), 250–319.

5. The overt classification of members according to confessional background would likely have run counter to the party's claim to uphold confessional neutrality. For the most comprehensive membership list see the NSDAP-Hauptarchiv (Hoover Institution), Reel 10, folder 215 (hereafter cited as NSDAP-HA 10/fol. 215); see also the lists in NSDAP-HA 2a/fol. 230; NSDAP-HA 8/fol. 171. On the early party membership more generally, see Michael Kater's seminal article "Zur Soziographie der frühen NSDAP," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 19 (1971): 124–59; idem, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919–1945* (Oxford, 1983), 19–31; Dietrich Orlow, "The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919–23," *Journal of Modern History* 37 (1965): 208–26; Donald M. Douglas, "The Parent Cell: Some Computer Notes on the Composition of the First Nazi Party Group in Munich, 1919–21," *Central European History* 10 (1977): 55–72; Paul Madden, "Some Social Characteristics of Early Nazi Party Members, 1919–23," *Central European History* 15 (1982): 34–56. But see also Jürgen Genuneit, "Methodische Probleme der quantitativen Analyse früher NSDAP-Mitglieder," in *Die Nationalsozialisten: Analyse faschistischer Bewegungen*, ed. Reinhard Mann (Stuttgart, 1980), 34–66, on the general difficulties involved in any statistical approach to the early Nazi membership.

6. According to Guenter Lewy: "In the early twenties the Hitler movement was small in numbers and Catholic membership within it was smaller still"; Lewy, *Catholic Church*, 7. See also, e.g., Rudolf Morsey, "Die katholische Volksminderheit und der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus," in *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*, ed. Klaus Götto and Konrad Repgen (Mainz, 1983), 9–24. Björn Mensing concludes quite simply: "It seems that the majority of Hitler's early supporters in Munich were Protestant"; Mensing, "Der Münchener Protestantismus," in *München — Hauptstadt der Bewegung: Bayerns Metropole und der Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Richard Bauer et al. (Munich, 1993), 424. Mensing's work on the Protestant clergy in Bavaria, however, notes that it is difficult to estimate the level of participation of Protestants (especially clergy) in the Nazi movement before circa 1925; Mensing, *Pfarrer und Nationalsozialismus: Geschichte einer Verstrickung am Beispiel der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern* (Göttingen, 1998), 92.

urgent letter to Munich's Archbishop Faulhaber in response to the massive numbers of Bavarian Catholics who were helping fuel the rapid growth experienced by the NSDAP throughout 1923.⁷ While Held claimed that the leadership of the movement consisted "almost exclusively of Protestants" (a claim that was true of the broader *völkisch* movement but certainly not of the Nazi Party itself), he was forced to concede implicitly that the rank and file was made up largely of Catholics, referring to the movement as a "great falling-away from the Catholic faith and from the church." Unwilling to admit that a true Catholic would willingly join the Nazis' radical racial and political crusade, Held asserted that many Catholics were simply naive and were blindly allowing themselves to be misled: "many Catholics are going along with the crowd, infatuated by catchy phrases and not knowing the end to which they are being misused." The brunt of Held's anger was thus focused on the role played by Catholic opinion leaders, most notably priests, in propagandizing on behalf of the NSDAP and against the "Catholic" BVP: "Even priests are being caught up in National Socialist ideas and are allowing themselves to be shamefully misused as [Nazi] agitators . . . Under the guise of paramilitary sermons the Catholic populace, especially the Catholic youth, is being duped (*hinweggetäuscht*) about the true intentions of the leaders of the movement. It is a shame and a disgrace." Held concluded by pleading, ultimately in vain, for Faulhaber publicly to condemn the Nazi movement and offer an "open, forceful word of warning and repudiation to the Catholic populace," a warning that would have, not coincidentally, strongly benefited Held's BVP in its fierce local competition with the NSDAP.⁸ The high degree of Catholic visibility within the early Nazi movement in Munich was also not lost on at least one writer for the Social Democratic paper *Vorwärts*, who in July 1923 noted with derision that "it seems now to have become the fashion for Catholic priests to offer their services to the National Socialists," and who went on to speculate about the conditions that may have made such Catholic involvement in the NSDAP possible in the first place: "Catholic priests as National Socialist storm-troop preachers — such a thing is only possible in the Bavarian 'cell of order,' where under the BVP a distinctive brand of Bavarian (*weissblauen*) Catholicism is being cultivated."⁹

7. The party grew from some 20,000 members in February 1923 to more than 55,000 by November 1923; Maser, *Frühgeschichte*, 376. On the origins of the BVP, which split off from the Catholic Center Party in late 1918, see Karl Schwend, *Bayern zwischen Monarchie und Diktatur* (Munich, 1955), 58–69; Klaus Schönhoven, *Die Bayerische Volkspartei 1924–1932* (Düsseldorf, 1972), 17–50.

8. Heinrich Held to Faulhaber, 6 October 1923, Erzbistumsarchiv München, Nachlass Faulhaber Nr. 7601; reprinted in *Akten Kardinal Michael von Faulhabers 1917–1945*, ed. Ludwig Volk, vol. 1 (Mainz, 1975), 314–15.

9. "Bayerische Priester als Hakenkreuzler," *Vorwärts*, no. 320 (11 July 1923). White and blue (*weissblau*) were the traditional patriotic colors of Bavaria.

While the distinctiveness referred to here applied first and foremost to the widespread conservatism and particularism of the BVP and its allies, which helped make Bavaria in the early 1920s a haven for right-wing extremists of various colorings, the *Vonwärts* writer did touch somewhat unwittingly on a basic and perhaps more important truth. The fact is that a "distinctive brand" of Catholicism had indeed prospered in Munich for quite some time, and does seem to have played at least an indirect role in facilitating the later involvement of Catholics in the early NSDAP. But rather than being engineered by the BVP to serve its political purposes, this older tradition of distinctiveness actually expressed itself more typically in forms that were less than hospitable to the forces of political Catholicism. In light of Heinrich Held's implicit claim that it was impossible for believing Catholics knowingly to embrace the goals of the NSDAP, a claim based on a definition of "Catholic" that equated religious loyalty to the church with support for the BVP, the role of political Catholicism in Munich's Catholic tradition deserves at least some attention. Let us then examine this tradition briefly before turning more specifically to the engagement of Catholics and their ideals in the early Nazi movement.

The "Peculiarity" of Munich's Catholic Tradition

That Bavaria, and Munich with it, has tended over the years to portray its own traditions as historically and qualitatively distinct from the rest of Germany is no revelation. Interestingly, however, recent research has begun to indicate that Catholicism in Munich in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may in fact have been quite singular, especially in relation to what has become known as the larger German Catholic milieu.¹⁰ Recent work by Karl Heinrich Pohl has suggested, for instance, that in the "mild political climate" of prewar Munich it was actually quite possible to be both a good Social Democrat and a

10. Much of the recent historical and sociological literature on German Catholicism has relied heavily on the concept of the "social-moral milieu," which came into broader circulation in the 1960s through the work of the political sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius, who posited the existence of four essentially antagonistic milieus within German society (conservative, bourgeois/liberal, socialist, and Catholic); see his "Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur: Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft," in *Wirtschaft, Geschichte und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Wilhelm Abel (Stuttgart, 1966), 371–93. When applied to the study of German Catholicism especially under the Kaiserreich, the "Catholic milieu" has often been portrayed as a nearly monolithic block within German society, unified across geographical distances by common patterns of ultramontane piety and expressing this unity politically in overwhelming support for the Catholic Center Party. While more recent formulations of the milieu concept have given it much more nuance, the image of a fairly hermetic Catholic (ultramontane) subculture separated from other social groupings by the tenacious walls of the "milieu" has continued to persist. See the collaborative work of the Arbeitskreis für kirchliche Zeitgeschichte Münster, "Katholiken zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Das katholische Milieu als Forschungsaufgabe," *Westfälische Zeitschrift* 43 (1993): 588–654.

loyal Catholic at the same time — in other words, to cross milieu-boundaries often thought to be impenetrable elsewhere. As Pohl demonstrates, a spirit of mutual cooperation and understanding characterized not only the behavior of reformist-oriented Marxist leaders in Munich but also that of parts of the Catholic clergy, and in at least one interesting case socialist candidates ran openly (specifically as socialists) for seats on a local parish administrative board and were elected.¹¹ In attempting to assimilate Pohl's findings into the larger milieu paradigm, Olaf Blaschke and Frank-Michael Kuhlemann have posited that this "surprising discovery" was essentially a *Sonderfall* (special case) that was likely due to the general weakness of religious identity in Munich, concluding that "the weaker the influence of religion, the easier it was to step out of the religious sphere and into other [spheres]."¹² It should be mentioned, however, that statistics based on regular communion rates do not at all indicate that religious practice was weaker in Munich than elsewhere.¹³ Furthermore, it is likely that further research will also reveal that the ability to move fairly fluidly from one milieu to another was not limited to Catholic workers in Munich. In political terms, this was certainly the case with the educated elites of the Reform Catholic movement in the early twentieth century, whose center of gravity in Germany was clearly Munich and whose adherents tended strongly toward liberal and nationalist circles, emphatically stressing the contrast between the perceived unhealthiness of political Catholicism (typically referred to as the misuse of religion for strictly political gain) and the nobility of a truly "religious" Catholicism.¹⁴

11. Karl Heinrich Pohl, "Katholische Sozialdemokraten oder sozialdemokratische Katholiken in München: Ein Identitätskonflikt?" in *Religion im Kaiserreich: Milieus — Mentalitäten — Krisen*, ed. Olaf Blaschke and Frank-Michael Kuhlemann (Gütersloh, 1996), 252–53. In light of the overwhelming mutual antipathy that typically characterized relations between the socialist and Catholic camps throughout Germany, Pohl declares: "In Munich things were completely different in this regard. To be a 'Catholic' and a 'Social Democrat' was no contradiction there; on the contrary, the 'Catholic Social Democrat' was the rule in Munich" (p. 234). See also Pohl's more general study *Die Münchener Arbeiterbewegung: Sozialdemokratische Partei, Freie Gewerkschaften, Staat und Gesellschaft in München 1890–1914* (Munich, 1992).

12. Blaschke and Kuhlemann, "Religion in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Sozialhistorische Perspektiven für die vergleichende Erforschung religiöser Mentalitäten und Milieus," in idem, ed. *Religion im Kaiserreich*, 53.

13. A study calculating the percentage of "religiously-practicing" Catholics in 1924 (based on communion statistics from each diocese) found that some 80 percent of Catholics in the archdiocese of Munich-Freising were "religiously-practicing," compared to 76.8 percent in Cologne and only 53.6 percent in Berlin; Johannes Schauff, *Die deutschen Katholiken und die Zentrumspartei: Eine politisch-statistische Untersuchung der Reichstagswahlen seit 1871* (Cologne, 1928), 178.

14. For a concise overview of Reform Catholicism in Germany see Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland 1870–1918* (Munich, 1988), 32–38. Much of the distinction between political and religious Catholicism centered originally around an influential series of articles published in Munich's *Allgemeine Zeitung* by the Catholic theologian Franz Xaver Kraus under the pen-name "Spectator" between 1895 and 1899; see Ernst Hauviller, *Franz Xaver Kraus: Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit des Reformkatholizismus* (Colmar, 1904), as well as the insightful introductory remarks of

As will be seen, support for political Catholicism among Catholics in particular was weaker in and around Munich than in any other Catholic area in the entire Reich. And, in light of the importance attributed to ultramontanist in giving the broader Catholic milieu much of its cohesiveness, it is important to note that Munich was also home to a fairly open tradition of Catholic anti-ultramontanist (or at least a coolness toward ultramontanist based on the distinction between political and religious Catholicism) that was well-rooted among believing Catholics and was by no means confined to the margins of Munich Catholic society.¹⁵ In any event, for the purposes of the present study it may be most fruitful simply to acknowledge that a striking permeability of the Catholic milieu in Munich did apparently exist, whether due to an actual weakness of religious identity or not, and to consider how this quality may have manifested itself after the First World War and to what effect.

A useful glimpse into these issues is provided by a programmatic essay written by the Catholic historian Philipp Funk to welcome visitors to Munich on the occasion of the national Catholic congress (*Katholikentag*) in August 1922, and published in *Hochland*, the Munich-based journal that was by common acclaim the leading Catholic cultural forum in the German-speaking world. Funk's main objective in writing the essay was to introduce other German Catholics to the distinctiveness of the Catholic tradition in Munich — or, as Funk put it, to “Munich's Catholic peculiarity” (*Münchener katholischen Eigensein*). Referring critically to the tendency in German Catholicism, especially in the north, toward a “confessional nervousness” that manifested itself in “anxious feelings of inferiority” and in a “combative party-consciousness that is robbed of any positive development by resentment of ‘the other’,” Funk praised the contrast offered by Munich and the “naturalness and self-assuredness” of its more open Catholic tradition. While the atmosphere in Munich often lacked the “refined purity of catacomb Christianity” as well as “the unity, solidarity, and sacrificiality of the north German diaspora,” Funk believed it was precisely this less rigid quality that could offer a “significant stimulus to all of Catholic

Christoph Weber in *Liberaler Katholizismus: Biographische und kirchenhistorische Essays von Franz Xaver Kraus*, ed. Christoph Weber (Tübingen, 1983), vii–xxxv, 1–31. On the liberal-nationalist orientation of Kraus's followers in Munich, who formed the influential “Kraus Society” and were committed enemies of the Center Party, see Jörg Haustein, *Liberal-katholische Publizistik im späten Kaiserreich: “Das neue Jahrhundert” und die Krausgesellschaft* (Göttingen, 2001).

15. Anti-ultramontanist Catholics were typically nationalists who tended not to dispute the religious authority of the pope or the German episcopate and, since they chose deliberately to stay inside the Catholic Church, were often eager to differentiate themselves from adherents of the Old Catholic Church, which had split off from the Catholic Church in the 1870s in opposition to the dogma of papal infallibility. For a preliminary sketch of the phenomenon of Catholic antiultramontanist more generally, see Norbert Schlossmacher, “Antiultramontanismus im Wilhelminischen Deutschland: Ein Versuch,” in *Deutscher Katholizismus im Umbruch zur Moderne*, ed. Wilfried Loth (Stuttgart, 1991), 164–98.

Germany." Funk also sharply criticized what has become known in the historiographical literature as one of the central hallmarks of the Catholic milieu — the thickness and exclusivity of its all-encompassing associational life — by contrasting the "organizational mania" (*Organisierewut*) of Catholicism elsewhere in Germany with the relaxed earthiness more typical of Munich.¹⁶ For Funk the walls of the confessional milieu, which in other Catholic areas had been constituted and defined since the *Kulturkampf* by a fierce organizational spirit and a defensive, exclusive attitude toward non-Catholics, were in fact considerably more porous in the less rigid climate of Munich.

This aspect becomes unmistakably clear in regard to political Catholicism, which Funk viewed as an unhealthy outgrowth of the combative confessional atmosphere that originated in the Prussian territories and had been imported into Bavaria in the form of the Bavarian Center Party during the Kaiserreich and its postwar successor party, the BVP. For Funk, however, Munich remained a refreshing oasis of freedom within a larger Catholic culture that often forcibly equated religious sincerity with support for political Catholicism:

The spiritual essence of Munich's Catholic character was never besmirched by politics. Here there were always believing Catholics who did not subscribe to the policies of the Bavarian Center Party . . . and there are still today earnest believing Catholics (*ernsthafte gläubige Katholiken*) who cannot go along with the successor of the Bavarian Center Party [the BVP], which seems to be guided much less by Catholic principles than by concern for the mood of the voters and by unrefined popular instincts based in part upon resentment.¹⁷

While advocating the principle of strict confessional neutrality in political matters (suggesting that "a free and neutral stance" should take the place of political Catholicism), Funk concluded this part of his discussion on a somewhat more conciliatory note: "We do not in this regard wish to speak against the validity, and sometimes the partial necessity, of a political union of German Catholics. [We wish] only to note what has long been recognized in Munich: that the obligation to the policies of such a party only applies to the extent that the goals of the party are the same as the duties laid out by the Catholic faith."¹⁸

16. Philipp Funk (pseud. Julius), "München im katholischen Geistesleben der deutschen Gegenwart," *Hochland* 19, no. 11 (August 1922): 497–506, esp. 498, 501, 499–500, 503–5.

17. *Ibid.*, 503.

18. *Ibid.*, 503–4. In light of these critical statements toward the BVP and Center Party, it is important to note that *Hochland* was not only firmly in the mainstream of "loyal" Catholicism but that Funk was himself far from being a marginal figure. After his 1925 habilitation he assumed a *Lehrstuhl* in Modern History at the University of Freiburg, where for years he played a leading role in shaping Catholic historical scholarship as editor of the journal *Historisches Jahrbuch*; see Roland Engelhardt, *Wir schlugen unter Kämpfen und Opfern dem Neuen Bresche": Philipp Funk (1884–1937) Leben und Werk* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).

Funk was clearly not alone in his critical sentiments toward political Catholicism, as evidenced by a glance at the “distinctive” electoral behavior of Munich’s Catholics. Supporters of the Center Party and/or BVP had in fact been in the minority specifically among Catholic voters in and around Munich since the late 1890s.¹⁹ While the Center Party had received a fairly impressive 80.1 percent of the Catholic vote (76.8 percent of the total) in Upper Bavaria in the 1874 Reichstag elections, this figure had dropped to 45.3 percent among Catholics by 1898, the lowest of any Catholic region in the entire Reich — a claim to fame that Upper Bavaria, including Munich, was to maintain through the 1920s.²⁰ By 1919, only 38.7 percent of Catholic voters in Upper Bavaria voted for the BVP; after spiking somewhat in 1920, Catholic support for the BVP in the province leveled off at around 42 percent in both the May and December 1924 elections.²¹ Even calculations to determine the voting behavior of “religiously-practicing” Catholics in December 1924, who made up around 80 percent of the Catholic population in the archdiocese of Munich-Freising, demonstrate that only about half (53 percent) of the most active Catholics in Upper Bavaria voted for the BVP.²² The election returns from the city of Munich itself were considerably more drastic. In a city whose population was nearly 85 percent Catholic, the Center Party received only 15.9 percent of the total vote in the Reichstag election of 1912 (the percentage of the Catholic vote was not officially calculated, but would have been around 19 percent). Following the war, the BVP vote in Munich initially peaked at 31.7 percent in

19. In the archdiocese of Munich-Freising, which coincided with much of the political region of Upper Bavaria, Catholics made up nearly 90 percent of the total population during the period under investigation (89.8 percent in 1916, 89 percent in 1925), whereas the population of Munich itself was 80–85 percent Catholic; J. Seiler, “Statistik des Erzbistums München und Freising in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *Das Erzbistum München und Freising in der Zeit der national-sozialistischen Herrschaft*, ed. Georg Schwaiger (Munich, 1984), 1:287.

20. Schauf, *Reichstagswahlen*, 174–75. A partial exception to this rule was the predominantly-Polish district of Oppeln (Upper Silesia), which witnessed a dramatic shift in Catholic voter loyalties between 1903, when the Center Party received 66 percent of the Catholic vote, and 1907, when that total dropped to 34.7 percent; this shift was due to the rise of the Polish nationalist party under Wojciech Korfanty. See Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870–1914* (Princeton, 1995), 196–99, and James Bjork, “Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Ambivalence in Upper Silesia, 1890–1914,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1999), esp. chap. 4.

21. By comparison, Catholic support for the Center Party in Münster remained in the 80–90 percent range before the First World War (90.1 percent in 1903, 83.2 percent in 1912) and was still 73.6 percent in December 1924; in Cologne, the Center Party got 73.8 percent of the Catholic vote in 1903, 70.6 percent in 1912, and still a respectable 55.7 percent in December 1924; Schauf, *Reichstagswahlen*, 175. On the quality of Schauf’s study, see Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser’s Voters: Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 1997), 16.

22. Center Party support among “practicing Catholics” in other Catholic cities was typically 20–30 percent higher than in and around Munich; in Münster 87.9 percent of these voted for the Center in 1924, while in Cologne and Berlin the figures were 72.5 percent and 72.8 percent, respectively (Schauf, 178).

1920 but had dropped back to 21.9 percent by May 1924.²³ Nearly four out of every five Munich citizens were at this point voting for parties other than the BVP.

These figures, and the "distinctiveness" they reveal, have implications for our understanding of Catholic involvement in the early NSDAP. They should, at the very least, call into question the common tendency, especially evident in much of the historiographical literature, to define the extent of one's "Catholic" identity by the level of one's support for political Catholicism — a definition that is central to the common circular assumption that supporters of the NSDAP must not have been practicing Catholics, since practicing Catholics supported the Center and BVP. This equation simply does not apply in regard to Munich. Additionally, the coolness toward organizational forms to which Philipp Funk referred is indicative of the fact that even energetic criticisms of ultramontanist (certainly of its manifestations in the political and organizational spheres) were not necessarily seen in Munich as a threat to one's identity as a believing Catholic. In the end, it is clear that whatever "immunizing" effect might have been exercised by an overriding allegiance to the representatives of political Catholicism was largely absent among Catholics in and around Munich, leaving the door open to a variety of political appeals, from the Left and, especially, from the radical Right and its increasingly vehement racial agenda.²⁴

Before proceeding further, it is important to note again that it is not possible to determine exactly how "Catholic" the early Nazi movement was in terms of membership statistics, nor can one effectively assess in retrospect the extent to which Catholics in the movement were religiously practicing (at the same time it should be noted that the level of religious practice among Catholics in the BVP is also impossible to determine reliably). As a result, the following sections will approach the question somewhat obliquely, focusing first on the rhetorical strategies employed by the young Nazi movement in representing its relationship to the Catholic faith and in distinguishing its message from that of the BVP, before examining the visibly increased activism of Catholics in the NSDAP in 1923 and the larger ideals that may have formed the backdrop to this activism, and then turning finally to the demise of Catholic engagement in the movement in 1924.

23. Dietrich Thränhardt, *Wahlen und politische Strukturen in Bayern 1848–1953* (Düsseldorf, 1973), 173.

24. For the thesis that adherence to political Catholicism had just such an "immunizing" effect more generally, see W.D. Burnham, "Political Immunization and Political Confessionalism: The United States and Weimar Germany," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (1972): 1–30.

Religious Identity and the Movement's Earliest Days

Whatever else it might have been, the Nazi movement was clearly a child of the atmosphere of extreme crisis that engulfed Munich after the First World War, where the revolution that toppled the Wittelsbach monarchy in November 1918 was succeeded in the spring of 1919 by two progressively radical attempts to erect a Soviet dictatorship in the Bavarian capital.²⁵ This brief but brutal Soviet experiment in Munich, in which Russian Jewish émigrés played an important part, did much to radicalize the antisemitism and anti-Marxism that were already well-rooted in much of the population.²⁶ The violent "liberation" of the city from the Soviet regime by counterrevolutionary military and paramilitary (Freikorps) forces in early May 1919 initiated a dramatic swing of the political pendulum, and by March 1920, with the installation of the ultraconservative Gustav von Kahr as minister-president, Bavaria was already far along in earning its well-deserved reputation as a refuge for right-wing radicals from across Germany. It was in this fluid atmosphere of crisis and uncertainty that the small German Workers' Party (Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or DAP) took its first steps, as one insignificant grouping in an expanding sea of radical political organizations, after being founded in January 1919 by the Catholic locksmith Anton Drexler and local sportswriter Karl Harrer. The party still had only a handful of members in September 1919 when Adolf Hitler attended his first DAP meeting and was persuaded to join.²⁷

Whatever religious identity the DAP may have had at its inception remains shrouded, although we do know that most of the original founding members came from Catholic backgrounds. Religion was not overtly emphasized early on, at least not in the internal organizational files and minutes or in the memoirs and recollections of the earliest members.²⁸ Much has been made, however, of the young party's ties to the Thule-Gesellschaft, a secretive and predominantly Protestant-led *völkisch* organization in Munich with close connections to the Leipzig-based antisemitic movement of Theodor Fritsch, who peddled a variety of pagan and occult ideas and advocated a vague Aryan religiosity based

25. The best account of these events in English is still Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, 1965); but see also Karl Bosl, ed., *Bayern im Umbruch, die Revolution von 1918: Ihre Voraussetzungen, ihr Verlauf und ihre Folgen* (Munich, 1969).

26. Olaf Blaschke has noted that prewar Munich was, alongside Vienna, a traditional "hotbed" of Catholic antisemitism; Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Göttingen, 1997), 131.

27. See Reginald Phelps, "Hitler and the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei," *American Historical Review* 68 (1963): 974–86.

28. Anton Drexler's 1919 political memoir, however, emphasizes his commitment to a specifically "Christian socialism" as proceeding "in the spirit of Christ, the most magnificent character in the history of the world"; Drexler, *Mein politisches Erwachen*, 3rd ed. (Munich, 1923), 48.

on ancient Germanic legends. These connections have often been emphasized to make the claim that the young Nazi movement not only benefited from the patronage of rich Protestant members of the Thule-Gesellschaft (such as Julius Friedrich Lehmann and Rudolf von Sebottendorff, both of whom were also vehemently anti-Catholic) but was also, even in the earliest stages of its development, closely aligned with potentially anti-Christian and even occult ideals.²⁹ The fact is, however, that such ideals within the Thule-Gesellschaft did not have a significant influence on the ideals that propelled the young Nazi movement.³⁰ Hitler and the vast majority of early Nazis were never members of the society, and even many of the society's adherents themselves — which included the Catholic priest Bernhard Stempfle — were much more likely to view the group's fascination with Germanic gods and legends as an interesting hobby than as a religious belief system.

There seems, in fact, to have been an overtly Catholic wing associated with the Thule-Gesellschaft — or at least with the society's publicistic organ, the *Völkischer Beobachter* — that did play a noticeable role in the development of the young Nazi movement. In July 1920 one of the editors of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Catholic publicist Franz Xaver Eder, founded a group called the "Association of Friends of the *Beobachter*" (Bund der Beobachterfreunde) as an umbrella organization to help consolidate the publicistic energies of the diffuse racist and nationalist movements that made up Munich's *völkisch* milieu, and to help shore up the *Beobachter's* struggling finances along the way. Whereas the leadership of the Thule-Gesellschaft was primarily Protestant (Sebottendorff and Lehmann were its two most visible figures), the offshoot Bund der Beobachterfreunde was run largely (perhaps entirely) by Catholics and, tellingly, chose as its meeting place not the spacious rooms of the Thule-Gesellschaft in the elegant Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten but the assembly hall of the Catholic Society House (Katholisches Gesellschaftshaus) on Munich's Brunnstrasse. The first official meeting of the association on 28 July 1920 was attended by a wide range of *völkisch* activists and was apparently quite contentious; Hitler, who was just beginning to become well-known beyond the confines of the small NSDAP, was present and took the floor to criticize the somewhat hazy aims of the Bund,

29. Rudolf von Sebottendorff, *Bevor Hitler kam: Urkundliches aus der Frühzeit der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung* (Munich, 1933), 31–42; Nicholas Goodricke-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (Wellingborough, 1985), 135–52; see also George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York, 1999), 117–35. More generally, Georg Franz, "Munich: Birthplace and Center of the National Socialist German Workers' Party," *Journal of Modern History* 29 (1957): esp. 326–28; Reginald Phelps, "Before Hitler Came: Thule Gesellschaft and Germanenorden," *Journal of Modern History* 35 (1963): 245–61.

30. See, e.g., Detlev Rose, *Die Thule-Gesellschaft: Legende, Mythos, Wirklichkeit* (Tübingen, 1994), 156–60.

calling for it to focus its energies more exclusively on political party-building.³¹ In the end the Bund was never able to gain a firm foothold on its own within Munich's fractured *völkisch* milieu, and its failure may well have been due to an inability to appeal to more Protestant-oriented groups or, more likely, to its being outflanked by the much more energetic NSDAP. Most of the Bund's membership seems to have been absorbed progressively and fairly harmoniously into the Nazi Party, especially after the party officially purchased the *Völkischer Beobachter* in December 1920, and the Bund essentially disappeared from view in early 1921.³² Importantly, one of the Bund's members was to become absolutely indispensable to the early development of the Nazi movement — the Catholic writer and editor Dietrich Eckart, whom Hitler claimed as his intellectual father figure. It was Eckart who was responsible for brokering the deal that acquired the *Völkischer Beobachter* for the NSDAP, a development that was one of the most important single factors contributing to the early growth of the party. As the official publicistic organ of the Nazi movement from January 1921 on, it was the *Beobachter* that brought the two central planks of the party's political message — anti-Marxism and, especially, a rabid brand of racial anti-semitism — to a steadily increasing readership in Munich.³³

War of Words: The Battle for Catholic Munich, 1920–1922

Following Hitler's decision to join the DAP in September 1919, plans were set in motion to take the tiny party's message to larger and larger audiences. While there was still much uncertainty as to exactly how the party could best win new

31. "Protokoll über die Gründungsversammlung des Bundes der Beobachterfreunde am 28. Juli 1920 im Katholischen Gesellschaftshaus," NSDAP-HA 83/fol.1691. Hitler (whose name was still unfamiliar enough to be misspelled as "Hittler") was also quoted as having accused the Bund of "lack[ing] courage"; "Zur Gründungsversammlung des Bundes der Beobachterfreunde," VB no. 69 (31 July 1920). See also Franz Xaver Eder to Polizeidirektion München, 26 July 1920, NSDAP-HA 89/fol. 1864; Sitzungen des Bundes der Beobachterfreunde, 25 July 1920, NSDAP-HA 83/fol. 1691; "Einladung zur Gründungsversammlung des Bundes der Beobachterfreunde," VB no. 65 (18 July 1920).

32. The latest independent meeting of the Bund for which records have survived was on 17 January 1921; NSDAP-HA 83/fol.1691. In the Munich police files a note from 24 January 1924 states that "nothing has been heard from the association since 1921." NSDAP-HA 89/fol. 1864.

33. On the VB more generally, see Roland Layton, "The *Völkischer Beobachter*, 1920–1933: The Nazi Party Newspaper in the Weimar Era," *Central European History* 3 (1970): 353–82. On Eckart, who at this time was still editing his own antisemitic journal in Munich entitled *Auf gut deutsch* and who was, in addition to being a professing Catholic, a heavy drinker and probably also a morphine addict, see especially Margarete Plewnia, *Auf dem Weg zu Hitler: Der völkische Publizist Dietrich Eckart* (Bremen, 1970). Eckart put up some of his own funds, but more importantly secured a large sum of money from General Franz von Epp to ensure the purchase of the *Beobachter*. Epp, who became Nazi governor of Bavaria in 1933, was also a professing Catholic, affectionately known in Nazi circles as the *Muttergottesgeneral*; see Katja-Maria Wächter, *Die Macht der Ohnmacht: Leben und Politik des Franz Xaver Ritter von Epp 1868–1946* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 125–27.

adherents, there was never any doubt that the decision to become a mass party would bring with it the need to appeal directly to Munich's Catholic population, which the BVP already claimed to represent.³⁴ On 24 February 1920 the DAP, which officially became the NSDAP a few weeks later, held its first major mass meeting, which drew some two thousand in attendance and was the forum in which the new party platform — the so-called 25 Points — was unveiled by Hitler. Of particular importance was Point 24 of the platform, which outlined the party's official stance in regard to religion: "We demand the freedom of all religious confessions within the state, as long as they do not threaten its existence or contradict the moral and ethical sensibility of the German race. The party itself represents the standpoint of positive Christianity, without binding itself to a specific confessional creed."³⁵ The party's policy of strict confessional neutrality likely increased the attractiveness of the NSDAP in the eyes of *völkisch* Catholics in Munich who did not support the monarchist particularism of the largely Catholic patriotic leagues but were uncomfortable with the predominantly Protestant orientation of numerous other right-wing radical organizations, such as the racist Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund.³⁶ Additionally, the emphasis on the principle of "positive Christianity," which was kept deliberately vague for as long as possible, remained for the NSDAP over the next few years a central component in its rhetorical battle against the BVP and its primary Munich organ, the *Bayerischer Kurier*.

One of the overarching principles that guided the NSDAP's religiously-oriented propaganda at this time, and which also tied it to a strong tendency in Munich's prewar tradition, was the aforementioned distinction between political Catholicism and religious Catholicism.³⁷ This strategy became apparent almost from the moment the *Völkischer Beobachter* became the official NSDAP organ in January 1921. Alfred Miller, who was often promoted as a professing Catholic, quickly became one of the primary writers for the *Beobachter* on reli-

34. While the BVP's strength in Munich was fairly weak in comparison to Catholic support for political Catholicism elsewhere, this support was considerably larger than the prewar Bavarian Center Party's had been and, with 31.7 percent of the 1920 vote, the BVP constituency was certainly a ripe and inviting target for the NSDAP. This is not to minimize the fact that the Nazis were also in fierce competition with the SPD — which, if Karl Heinrich Pohl is correct, included many believing Catholics (n. 11 above) — and the KPD for the loyalties of workers in Munich; it is, however, primarily in the battle against the BVP that the issue of religion can be traced.

35. Party program reprinted in Ernst Deuerlein, ed., *Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Augenzeugenberichten* (Düsseldorf, 1968), 111. It should be noted that the BVP was also technically interconfessional and occasionally referred to its own goals in terms of "positive Christianity."

36. Uwe Lohalm, *Völkischer Radikalismus: Die Geschichte des Deutschvölkischen Schutz- und Trutzbundes 1919–1933* (Hamburg, 1970), esp. 171–75. On Catholic monarchist groups in Bavaria, see Robert Garnett, *Lion, Eagle, and Swastika: Bavarian Monarchism in Weimar Germany, 1918–1933* (New York, 1991).

37. See, e.g., "Frivoler Missbrauch der Religion," *VB* no. 53 (5 July 1922).

gious issues and consistently (if clumsily) equated political Catholicism with ultramontanist across the board, contrasting both of these so-called evils to the purity of a religious Catholicism that recognized the authority of Rome in spiritual matters only.³⁸ While strongly criticizing the "power hungry spirit" of the Vatican mouthpiece *Civiltà cattolica*, for instance, and warning against threats of increased Roman interference in German affairs, Miller was also careful to stress that the Nazis' opposition was only to political Catholicism and that the party "does not in the least want to undermine the religious authority of the pope, especially in this permissive (*autoritätslosen*) age." On another occasion Miller made it clear that the NSDAP was committed to the "fight against all poisonous symptoms on the level of *völkisch* life, which unfortunately also include political Catholicism," but emphasized that the latter "must be sharply differentiated from religious Catholicism," which was to be highly valued as the movement's "comrade in arms against decadence."³⁹ The contrast between religious and political Catholicism, however, was often made more subtly, as for instance in August 1922, when the same issue of the *Völkischer Beobachter* featured a scathing attack on the Center Party while at the same time drumming up attendance for religious events associated with the upcoming *Katholikentag*, including a major concert service at the Frauenkirche which "promises to be an exceptional pleasure."⁴⁰ Exactly what was meant by phrases like "religious Catholicism" and "positive Christianity" was never clarified, and the primary emphasis seems to have been placed on a vaguely heroic notion of "active" Christianity said to be represented by the NSDAP in opposition to the lethargy of more hypocritical Christians. It was in this spirit that Hitler, in a phrase from one of his early NSDAP Christmas speeches, announced: "We do not want to be Christians merely in word, but rather Christians of the deed and of the sword (*Tat- und Schwertchristen*)."⁴¹

Nazi religious imagery also went to great lengths to portray the NSDAP as

38. Miller was referred to in the pages of the *VB* regularly as a "*deutsch-völkischer* Catholic and enemy of the Center Party"; see, e.g., the article praising Miller's criticism of Chancellor Wirth, "Dr. Wirth in katholischer Beleuchtung," *VB* no. 99 (22 December 1922). Miller was also the author of several popular and radically antiultramontanist books that aggressively attacked the Center Party, including *Ultramontanes Schuldbuch: Eine deutsche Abrechnung mit dem Zentrum und seinen Hintermännern* (Breslau, 1922).

39. Miller, "Staat, Religion und Kirche," *VB* no. 2 (6 January 1921); Miller and Hansjörg Maurer, "An die Adresse des Herrn Trasybulos im Bayer. Kurier," *VB* no. 34 (1 May 1921); Miller, "Anti-Ultramontaner Reichsverband und Freimaurerei," *VB* no. 80 (22 October 1921).

40. "Das wahre Gesicht des Zentrums" and "Kirchenkonzert" in *VB* no. 68 (26 August 1922).

41. "Unsere Weihnachtsfeier," *VB* no. 101 (20 December 1922). In a similar vein, the Nazi writer Michael Schmitt proclaimed: "The battle, which according to Catholic teaching takes place before the judgment seat of God, between Christianity and anti-Christianity, between idealism and materialism — this is the battle we National Socialists want to wage"; Michael Schmitt, "Christentum und Nationalsozialismus," *VB* no. 98 (9 December 1922).

the only true defender of Christianity (albeit, again, in largely undefined form), in contrast to the allegedly destructive and hypocritical exploitation of the Catholic faith by the politicians of the BVP and Center Party. Although the BVP had separated from the Reich Center Party in November 1918, the two Catholic sister parties remained closely aligned on religious issues, and the NSDAP was relentless in trying to link the BVP to major unpopular figures on the left wing of the Center Party, such as Matthias Erzberger and Joseph Wirth, both of whom were blamed for the Center's opportunistic and "un-Christian" cooperation with the so-called enemies of Christianity, the Jews and "godless" Marxists in Berlin.⁴² This tactic was especially clear in the journalistic labors of Dietrich Eckart, who had organized the purchase of the *Völkischer Beobachter* in December 1920 and then took over as its chief editor in August 1921. Tellingly, in his first front-page editorial, which attacked the Center Party for betraying Catholic principles and working with Marxist Jews "in the most perfect harmony," Eckart ostentatiously trumpeted to the readers of the *Beobachter* his identity as a professing Catholic, signing himself at the bottom of the editorial "Dietrich Eckart, Catholic."⁴³ After the assassination of Matthias Erzberger in late August 1921, a sanctimonious Eckart claimed in a scathing obituary that Erzberger's willingness to sacrifice Catholic convictions for political gain disqualified him from any posthumous celebration as a Catholic hero.⁴⁴ Similarly, in criticizing Joseph Wirth (then in his first term as chancellor) for joining with Jewish and Marxist politicians in praising Erzberger as a martyr, Eckart insisted that his commitment, as a Catholic and Nazi, to unmasking the evils of political Catholicism was not in contradiction with his religious principles but a specific product of them: "I am a Catholic, Dr. Wirth, and precisely for this reason I refuse most decisively to allow you, in your un-Catholic shallowness (*unkatholischen Seichtigkeit*), to abuse the name of Catholic."⁴⁵ For the duration of his two-year tenure as editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Eckart was relentless in

42. "Der Bayerischer Kurier der Schutzengel — Erzbergers," *VB* no. 46 (12 June 1921). See also, e.g., "Die 'christliche' Politik des Bayerischen Kuriers," *VB* no. 25 (29 March 1922); "Nach dem Abwerfen der Maske! Eine Abrechnung mit dem Bayer. Kurier," *VB* no. 53 (5 July 1922); "Der fromme Betrug," *VB* no. 8 (27 January 1923).

43. *VB* no. 61 (4 August 1921).

44. "Like a flash the vengeful hand of fate sent the pedantic soul of Matthias Erzberger back into the deep. He was undone by his unscrupulous vanity and nothing else . . . He was a cad (*Er war ein Lump*)"; Dietrich Eckart, "Erzberger," *VB* no. 69 (1 September 1921). This tasteless obituary brought about a two-week ban on the *VB*.

45. Eckart, "Der Verrat!" *VB* no. 70/73 (14 September 1921). In the same issue Alfred Miller lambasted the alleged pharisaism of Wirth and other Center Party politicians who "go around cloaked in the hypocritical mantle of Christianity in order to grab people by their religious convictions" only to make them "bow willingly under the Jewish authority of Berlin." Miller closed by asking "Is there anyone who doesn't gag over this type of Christianity?" Alfred Miller, "Die göttliche Reichsregierung," *VB* no. 70/73 (14 September 1921). This issue promptly brought about yet another two-week ban.

pursuing his concept of the "defense" of Christianity and in campaigning against political Catholicism, which he defined as "the corruption and political cowardice that goes around cloaked in the mantle of Christianity, and which therefore constitutes the crudest mockery of Christianity imaginable."⁴⁶

The BVP seems to have been somewhat unsure as to how best to respond to the rhetorical attacks of the NSDAP. For some time, the *Bayerischer Kurier* virtually ignored the upstart party, which was still comparatively insignificant (in numerical terms) and could only benefit from the increased publicity that would be generated by a direct confrontation with the pro-BVP press. When public condemnations of the NSDAP were leveled, however, they were made almost exclusively on religious grounds, dismissing the Nazis essentially as a group of anti-Christian rabble rousers. In fact, just as the *Völkischer Beobachter* went to great lengths to tie the BVP to the Center Party's alleged betrayal of Catholic principles on the national level, the BVP and its allies in the press attempted to label the Nazi movement in Munich as dangerous to Catholics by linking it to the anti-Catholic or overtly anti-Christian sentiments of *völkisch* organizations elsewhere that were either loosely affiliated with or sympathetic toward the NSDAP — most typically the Bohemian National Socialist Party under Rudolf Jung, whose political identity continued to be shaped by the virulent anti-Catholicism of the *Los-von-Rom* (Free from Rome) movement that had swept parts of the Habsburg lands before the First World War, and the north German racist movements associated with Theodor Fritsch and Artur Dinter, which openly espoused replacing traditional Christianity with some vague form of pagan or Germanic religiosity.⁴⁷

Once under the control of the NSDAP beginning in January 1921, the *Völkischer Beobachter* was quick to defend the party against such connections and, in doing so, made sure to distance the movement in Munich from overtly anti-Christian *völkisch* ideologies. A programmatic article from mid-January 1921, written clearly for a Catholic audience, energetically defended the Christian faith from its admittedly numerous detractors within the larger *völkisch* movement: "I consider it unjust and, from a purely Aryan standpoint, reprehensible when the attempt is made, as I have unfortunately witnessed frequently in *völkisch* circles, to portray the Christian religion as something inferior which must be combated because it is saturated with a semitic spirit."

46. "Verhöhnung des Christentums durch 'Christen': Eine Abrechnung mit dem Bayerischen Kurier," *VB* no. 22 (18 March 1922).

47. Already in December 1920 the Jesuit Augustin Bea had published an influential article in the Jesuits' Munich-based organ, linking the racial antisemitism of the local *völkisch* milieu, including the NSDAP, to the Germanic racial and religious ideas of both Fritsch and Dinter through their common condemnation of the Talmud and Old Testament; Bea, "Antisemitismus, Rassentheorie und Altes Testament," *Stimmen der Zeit* 100 (December 1920).

Clearly distancing himself (and the party) from the anti-Christian Germanic religious ideologies with which the Nazis were being linked, the author urged *völkisch* Catholics to stay faithful to the Catholic "faith of their fathers" with the explicit plea "Let us not fabricate any surrogate [religions]."⁴⁸ While it should be noted that anti-Christian views were by no means completely absent from the Munich movement itself — these can be seen most visibly in the contributions of Alfred Rosenberg, who was brought by Dietrich Eckart onto the editorial staff of the *Völkischer Beobachter* when Eckart became chief editor in 1921 — it should also be noted that these views remained clearly in the minority.⁴⁹ In fact, even pro-BVP opponents of the Nazis like Erhard Schlund, a Franciscan priest from Munich's St. Anna Cloister, were forced to admit that the NSDAP in Munich was essentially a "Catholic-oriented movement."⁵⁰

Apparently feeling it unwise to continue a policy of mild restraint, the annual party congress of the BVP in late October 1922 passed a resolution to initiate for the first time an official publicity campaign to "enlighten" Bavarian Catholics about the dangers posed by the NSDAP.⁵¹ As part of this campaign, Innenminister Franz Schwyer went before the Landtag several times in November to speak on the National Socialist danger, "which has been given too little attention to this point," characterizing the movement as an unhealthy "symptom of these sick, unsettled times."⁵² In December, the BVP politician and Catholic priest Wilhelm Vielberth began an influential series of quite detailed articles attempting to penetrate the deliberate opacity of the Nazis' religious façade to reveal the party's true nature, criticizing both the vagueness of the notion of "positive Christianity" and its potential for reducing all substantive Christianity (on both the Catholic and Protestant sides) into a nonde-

48. F. Dietrich, "Arisches Glaubenstum," *VB* no. 4 (13 January 1921). Similarly, see the meticulous 2-part rebuttal to the allegations made by Augustin Bea, "Antisemitismus, Rassentheorie und Altes Testament," *VB* no. 31 (17 April 1921); *VB* no. 32 (24 April 1921).

49. Rosenberg was frequently allowed in the pages of the *VB* to present his religious views, which had not yet fully crystallized into the form they would take in his *Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* but were undoubtedly already unattractive enough to Munich Catholics. See esp. "Gedanken zum Katholikentag," *VB* no. 69 (30 August 1922) and "Katholikentag und Nationalsozialismus," *VB* no. 70 (2 September 1922). Ernst Hanfstaengl later recalled in his memoirs an occasion in the offices of the *Völkischer Beobachter* when he and Eckart, both angered in part by the tactlessness of Rosenberg's anti-Catholic articles, discussed Eckart's regret at having brought Rosenberg on board: "Hanfstaengl, if only I had known what I was doing when I introduced Rosenberg into the party . . . He will make a laughingstock of us all if this goes on." Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Unheard Witness* (Philadelphia, 1957), 84.

50. Schlund, "Der Münchener Nationalsozialismus und die Religion," *Allgemeine Rundschau* 31 (2 August 1923).

51. For the text of the resolution, see *Bayerische Volkspartei Correspondenz [BVC]* (28 October 1922).

52. Text of Schwyer speech in *BVC* (21 November 1922); see also *BVC* (16 November 1922); *BVC* (1 December 1922); and "Die Nationalsozialisten und die Bayer. Volkspartei," *BVC* (13 December 1922).

script and religiously meaningless Germanic amalgamation.⁵³ Vielberth also condemned the extreme racial antisemitism of the movement, which he saw as anti-Christian both for its tendency to deny the Old Testament and its violation of the decree to love one's neighbors, and he also attacked the anti-Christian "pantheism" he perceived in much of the party's rhetoric.⁵⁴ For all its faults, Vielberth's project was to that point the most detailed, and potentially most damaging, critical examination of an issue the Nazis had apparently hoped would remain vague. It may be that the BVP's "enlightenment" campaign prompted the NSDAP to make its religious stance more explicit. In any case, over the course of 1923 the party's rhetoric would become considerably more overt in its appeal to Catholic-Christian identity, and by the summer of 1923 the public face of the movement would come to look, for a time, almost strikingly Catholic.

The High Point of Catholic Engagement: 1923

Beginning in early 1923, the religious identity of the NSDAP, which hitherto had often been concealed behind vague references to "positive Christianity" and self-serving attacks against the hypocrisy of the BVP and Center Party, began to take on a more overtly Catholic hue. In January, in direct response to the Vielberth article series, an unnamed Catholic priest from within the Nazi movement was allowed to publish a programmatic article in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, which not only refuted Vielberth's detailed attacks one by one but also provided one of the strongest statements of commitment to the party's principle of "positive Christianity," which was portrayed as the natural political ally both of religious Catholicism and Protestantism.⁵⁵

Also in early 1923 the party began announcing publicly that larger and larger numbers of "outspokenly Catholic men and women" had not only joined the Nazi movement but were even emerging openly as spokesmen, including not only believing laymen but also, significantly, Catholic priests.⁵⁶ Dr. Philipp

53. Wilhelm Vielberth, "Der Nationalsozialismus und die Religion," originally published in the *Augsburger Postzeitung* in December 1922, and reprinted months later as "Der Nationalsozialismus," *Politische Zeitsfragen* 5/6 (May-June 1923). Vielberth's main points were also presented in two-part condensed form for the use of BVP officials as "Der Nationalsozialismus," *BVC* (16 January 1923) and *BVC* (18 January 1923).

54. Vielberth in reality drew all his examples of this anti-Christian pantheism from a recent book by the Bohemian activist Rudolf Jung, *Der nationale Sozialismus* (Munich, 1922). Even the anti-Nazi Erhard Schlund noted that Vielberth missed the boat here in regard to the Munich NSDAP, which had very little to do with the ideas of Jung; Schlund, "Der Münchener Nationalsozialismus und die Religion."

55. "Nationalsozialismus und Religion," *VB* no. 7 (24 January 1923).

56. See "Der fromme Betrug" and "Ängste der Bayerischen Volkspartei," *VB* no. 8 (27 January 1923).

Haeuser, who administered a small parish some 30 miles west of Munich, in the town of Strassberg, had been on good terms with the Nazi movement for some time, but had intensified his involvement with the party especially after the *Völkischer Beobachter* became Haeuser's most vociferous defender during a well-publicized controversy with his ecclesiastical superiors over the vehemence of his antisemitic speeches in December 1922.⁵⁷ It was also around this time that the young priest Joseph Roth, who was to become very visible in Nazi propaganda in the summer of 1923 and who would later become an important Nazi official, first came into close contact with the NSDAP.⁵⁸ Additionally, according to Heinrich Hoffmann, it was in early 1923 that the priest Bernhard Stempfle first became a "prominent member" of Hitler's inner circle, regularly joining Hitler at his corner table in the Café Heck and advising him frequently on religious issues.⁵⁹ Even one of Munich's better-placed Catholic clergy, Dr. Wilhelm August Patin, became closely affiliated with the NSDAP sometime in 1923; Patin was Hofstiftsvikar at Munich's St. Cajetan Church and, incidentally, was also the cousin of Heinrich Himmler.⁶⁰

Of all the Catholic priests in and around Munich to align themselves with the NSDAP in early 1923, one of the most influential was certainly Abbot Alban Schachleiter, a Benedictine monk and musicologist who, as a German nationalist, had been forced out of his position as abbot of the Emmaus monastery in Prague in the wake of the establishment of the new Czechoslovak state in December 1918, and had eventually settled at Munich's St. Boniface Abbey. Schachleiter soon cultivated good connections with many among

57. See especially "Jüdische Anmassung und bischöfliche Schwäche," *VB* no. 99 (13 December 1922); "Berichtigung" *VB* no. 7 (24 January 1923). The *VB* also heavily publicized Haeuser's *Wir deutschen Katholiken und die moderne revolutionäre Bewegung: Oder, Los von Opportunismus und zurück zur Prinzipientreue!* (Regensburg, 1922), which was a broadside against the opportunistic betrayal of Catholic principles by the BVP and Center Party. In a glowing review, which noted that the book had gone through several editions in its first few months, the *VB* extolled Haeuser's personal service to the movement, saying "When the day of the National Socialists has finally arrived, this valiant priest will have to be remembered"; *VB* no. 8 (27 January 1923).

58. On Roth's career after 1933, see Roman Bleistein SJ, "Überläufer im Sold der Kirchenfeinde: Joseph Roth und Albert Hartl, Priesterkarrieren im Dritten Reich," *Beiträge zur althayerischen Kirchengeschichte* 42 (1996): 71–111.

59. Hoffmann calls Stempfle a "man of strong personality" but states that "Hitler was originally suspicious of him and thought him a spy of the church party"; Stempfle, however, was soon able to gain Hitler's "full confidence" and advised him regularly to maintain a friendly stance toward the Catholic Church; Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler Was My Friend*, trans. R. H. Stevens (London, 1955), 52. Stempfle, who later aided Hitler greatly in the original editing of *Mein Kampf*, was eventually killed in the Röhm Purge of 1934.

60. Patin recalled in an early 1934 statement that he had attended "numerous [Nazi] gatherings in the Hofbräuhaus" at least a decade earlier; cited in Denzler, "Gebetssturm," 140. On Patin's relationship to the Nazi Party, which culminated in his being appointed *SS-Hauptsturmführer* in January 1937, see the correspondence between Patin and Himmler (esp. Patin to Himmler, 3 February 1937); NSDAP-HA 98/fol. 7.

Munich's Catholic patriciate — including Karl Alexander von Müller, professor of history at the University of Munich, and Helene Raff, an unmarried high-society matron — and it was in fact through these connections that Schachleiter first came into personal contact with Adolf Hitler.⁶¹ Both von Müller and Hitler's close friend Ernst Hanfstaengl, who was himself first introduced to Schachleiter by Helene Raff, make mention in their memoirs of the first meeting between Hitler and Schachleiter sometime in late 1922 or early 1923, when Hitler was invited to a luncheon at the apartment of Hanfstaengl's sister (who lived in the same building as both Müller and Helene Raff) attended by Müller, Raff, Schachleiter, and both Hanfstaengls. Both Müller and Hanfstaengl record that Hitler and Schachleiter engaged in a lively and very lengthy conversation and were impressed with each other, and this first meeting marked the beginning of a close relationship that lasted until Schachleiter's death in 1937.⁶² The meeting also opened the door for Schachleiter to play an important propagandistic role on behalf of the NSDAP a few months later, in the summer of 1923.

In late April of 1923 the NSDAP officially announced an unprecedented drive for new membership. While none of the notices publicizing the new campaign stated overtly that religious Catholics were being targeted especially for recruitment, the membership drive was accompanied by certain small but quite telling changes, including the new practice of providing a detailed schedule of masses in the Sunday morning edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and even periodic official encouragements to attend mass.⁶³ Another innovation was the occasional inclusion of devotional prayers attached specifically to the schedule for Catholic masses; the first of these prayers focused on the person of Hitler,

61. Müller, who had first met Hitler in 1919, records in his memoirs that he became acquainted with Schachleiter shortly after the latter's arrival in Munich and that the two met on numerous occasions to discuss politics and Schachleiter's musical fascination with Gregorian chant; Karl Alexander von Müller, *Im Wandel einer Welt: Erinnerungen 1919–1932* (Munich, 1966), 130–31. It is possible that Schachleiter's musical interests were also what brought him into contact with Helene Raff, whose father had been the renowned composer Joachim Raff; on Helene Raff generally, see her memoirs, *Blätter vom Lebensbaum* (Munich, 1938).

62. Müller, *Im Wandel einer Welt*, 129; Hanfstaengl, *Zwischen Weissem und Braunem Haus: Memoiren eines politischen Aussenseiters* (Munich, 1970), 107–8. Schachleiter kept in touch over the years (albeit sporadically at times) with Karl Alexander von Müller. In March 1936 Müller, who was by then one of the leading Nazi historians, fondly reminded Schachleiter of their common "circle of friends" and mentioned Helene Raff by name; Müller to Schachleiter, 10 March 1936, NSDAP-HA 55/1330.

63. The official announcement for the upcoming "record level of propagandistic activity" (*Höchstleistung an Werbetätigkeit*) was initially made in the regular column "An die Ortsgruppen!" *VB* no. 79 (28 April 1923). The listing of Sunday masses, which included not only Catholic masses but Old Catholic and Protestant services, began with *VB* no. 80 (29/30 April 1923). See also, e.g., the notice for the Nazi hiking club outing scheduled for Sunday, 12 August 1923, which emphasized attendance at mass (*Kirchgang vorher!*); *VB* no. 161 (12/13 August 1923).

not as a godlike figure in his own right (those images would come later) but as an upright Christian leader reliant on the faithful prayers of his followers: "O God, protect our Hitler, lead him in the correct path and bless his work. O let your light triumph on earth, and break the proud power of the enemy! Grant our people the order, composure, and peace of the German day that follows the dismal night."⁶⁴ Additionally, the week after the membership drive was announced, the *Völkischer Beobachter* featured an especially striking "devotional poem" by the Catholic priest Ottokar Kernstock (who was, of course, explicitly identified at the outset as a Catholic priest) entitled "The Swastika."⁶⁵

It is almost certainly not coincidental that these changes occurred shortly after the arrival in Munich of another very influential Catholic priest, one who was well-known throughout Germany and who soon became a central NSDAP strategist and perhaps the party's busiest official propaganda spokesman in and around Munich in the summer of 1923. Dr. Lorenz Pieper, who for years had been one of the leading figures in the influential Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland (his brother August Pieper had served many years as general secretary of the Volksverein), took a leave from his parish in Westphalia and moved to Munich in early April 1923 to openly campaign for the NSDAP. Despite the fact that the NSDAP's membership was still concentrated largely in Munich and the surrounding area, Pieper had become attracted to the movement early on and had joined the party officially in 1922 after meeting with Hermann Esser, one of the primary party leaders in Munich, who had spoken at a gathering of the fledgling Nazi cell in Hagen.⁶⁶ Upon his arrival in Munich, Pieper worked closely with Hitler in plotting party strategy, even living with

64. VB no. 97 (20/21 May 1923). On the later and quite different phenomenon of Nazism as a "political religion," one of Eric Voegelin's central insights that has recently come back in vogue, see especially Klaus-Ekkehard Bärtsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1998), and Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York, 2000), esp. 1–23.

65. O. Kernstock, "Das Hakenkreuz," VB no. 85 (5 May 1923). A few lines from the first and third stanzas convey the essence of the poem's kitschy, but also catchy and quite effective, lyricism: "Das Hakenkreuz im weissen Feld, auf feuerrotem Grunde / Gibt frei und offen aller Welt die hochgemute Kunde: / Wer sich um dieses Zeichen schart, ist deutsch mit Seele, Sinn und Art / und nicht bloss mit dem Munde . . . Das Hakenkreuz im weissen Feld, auf feuerrotem Grunde / Hat uns mit stolzem Mut beselt. Es schlägt in uns'rer Runde / kein Herz, das feig die Treue bricht. Wir fürchten Tod und Teufel nicht! / Mit uns ist Gott im Bunde." This poem was heavily recirculated by Nazi Catholics after Hitler came to power. Friedrich Heer cites a slightly altered version of the poem that was published in 1933 (as an afterword to Simon Pirchegger, *Hitler und die katholische Kirche* [Graz, 1933]), but seems to have been unaware of the poem's 1923 origins and context; Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler: Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), 216.

66. On Pieper's activities in his home diocese of Paderborn see Father Werner Tröster, "Die besondere Eigenart des Herrn Dr. Pieper! Dr. Lorenz Pieper, Priester der Erzdiözese Paderborn, Mitglied der NSDAP Nr. 9740," in *Das Erzbistum Paderborn in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Ulrich Wägenar (Paderborn, 1993), 45–91; Wieland Vogel, *Katholische Kirche und nationale Kampferbände in der Weimarer Republik* (Mainz, 1989), esp. 56–59.

him for some time due to lack of funds.⁶⁷ Some three weeks after his arrival, the *Völkischer Beobachter* made the gleeful public announcement that Pieper had indeed joined the movement in Munich, and went on to boast that "not only Dr. Pieper, but also a further succession of younger members of the Catholic clergy" had made the decision to cast their lot with the Nazis "in the battle for the salvation of the Christian-German spirit."⁶⁸ Over the next several months Pieper was kept quite busy with almost ceaseless speaking engagements, which included giving at least one major speech in each of the individual NSDAP sections in Munich itself, as well as conducting a major barnstorming tour throughout the Catholic Bavarian countryside in August 1923. Also, perhaps in an attempt to further clarify the party's previously vague religious stance, the *Völkischer Beobachter* began pointing to Pieper as a living embodiment of what was meant by the Nazi ideal of "positive Christianity."⁶⁹

But the opportunity to portray perhaps the most effective human embodiment of the Nazis' increasingly Catholic-oriented Christian stance materialized somewhat by chance. On 26 May 1923 a French firing squad executed the young German saboteur Albert Leo Schlageter near Düsseldorf for terrorist activity in opposing the French occupation of the Ruhr region. As it turned out, Schlageter had been not only a decorated war veteran and seasoned Freicorps fighter, but also a deeply religious Catholic and, as a student, a member of the largest Catholic student fraternity federation in Germany, the Cartellverband der katholischen deutschen Studentenverbindungen (CV), whose headquarters were in Munich.⁷⁰ Schlageter was also an active member of the NSDAP, having been, in his nomadic travels, one of the founding members of the small party branch in Berlin in 1922 before transferring his membership to the Munich NSDAP in January 1923. While he quickly became a heroic martyr figure in *völkisch* and ultranationalist circles throughout Germany, the NSDAP leadership in Munich decided specifically to base much of its membership drive propaganda on the foundation of Schlageter's Catholic faith, making him for a couple of months into the most visible symbol of the party itself, the harmonious physical embodiment of a heroic Catholic-Nazi synthesis.⁷¹

67. Tröster, "Eigenart," 54.

68. "Dr. Pieper Nationalsozialist?" *VB* no. 84 (4 May 1923).

69. See the *VB*'s regular announcement column "Sektionsversammlungen" between June and August 1923, as well as *VB* no. 170 (24 August 1923); *VB* no. 172 (26/27 August 1923); *VB* no. 173 (28 August 1923).

70. Schlageter had joined the CV originally in early 1919 while studying at the University of Freiburg. See the reports on the CV's ten-year commemoration of Schlageter's death, "Der CV gedenkt seines toten Cartellbruders," *Academia: Monatsschrift des CV der katholischen deutschen Studentenverbindungen* 46, no. 3 (July 1933): 69–77.

71. "Schlageter in München," *Academia* 46, no. 3 (July 1933): 65. See also Hans Sadowsky, "Schlageter und die NSDAP," *Hannoverscher Anzeiger* no. 122 (25 May 1933), and the (admittedly

Party propaganda began constructing an elaborate cult to surround the fallen hero, and official party events were opened with a solemn moment of remembrance for Schlageter. Additionally, a wide variety of commemorative keepsakes — including Schlageter photos, medallions, biographical pamphlets, and even sheet music to the popular "Schlageter song" — were produced and marketed endlessly in the *Völkischer Beobachter*. One of the local Munich sections of the Nazi SA (Sturmabteilung, the paramilitary branch of the NSDAP) even took on Schlageter's name, becoming the "SA-Schlageter," and organized a series of major commemorative events, ranging from a motorcycle relay to Schlageter's hometown in Baden to formal dinners in his honor.⁷²

Again, what is striking about the Nazi cultivation of this commemorative cult is the overt emphasis on Schlageter's Catholic faith and its positive relationship to his Nazi identity. Although the brave final hours of Schlageter's life were recounted, almost step by step, in a wide variety of press accounts throughout Germany, the *Völkischer Beobachter* made sure specifically to stress the religious significance of Schlageter's end, which had occurred under the most difficult circumstances:

In the night before the execution [Schlageter's confessor] pleaded repeatedly to be allowed to honor the wishes of the condemned, to hear his confession and give him communion, but in vain. Only shortly before the departure [for the execution site] was the priest given this permission, and Schlageter was allowed a total of only fifteen minutes to give his final confession and to receive holy communion. And even then the holy observance was repeatedly interrupted by cries of "Hurry! Hurry!"⁷³

Despite the bestial behavior of his French captors, however, Schlageter went decisively and with almost Christ-like composure to his death, "refusing the offer of a stay of execution," and vowing to "die the way a German officer dies." Schlageter thus provided, in his devout faith while alive and strong determina-

sparse) materials in the Nazi party file on Schlageter, NSDAP-HA 53/fol. 1265. For a basic overview of Schlageter's life, and especially on his privileged position in Nazi mythology after 1933, see Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990), 13–40. Baird, however, overlooks the larger significance of Schlageter's Catholic faith, mentioning neither Schlageter's important connection with the CV nor the utilization of his religious identity by the NSDAP.

72. The first instance of this commemorative process was a mass meeting at the Circus Krone on 1 June 1923, which Hermann Esser began with the solemn homage: "We National Socialists mourn in Schlageter the loss of our best and most loyal party comrade"; report in *VB* no. 106 (3/4 June 1923). The advertisements for Schlageter keepsakes ran for weeks on end in the summer of 1923. A copy of the sheet music for the famous "Schlageter-Lied," which was written by Ernst Hanfstaengl (*Unheard Witness*, 87), can be found in NSDAP-HA 53/fol. 1265. For various activities of the SA, see "Schlageter-Motorradstafette der SA," *VB* no. 117 (16 June 1923); "Schlageterfeier der SA," *VB* no. 122 (22 June 1923); "Schlageter-Abend," *VB* no. 128 (29 June 1923).

73. "Zu Schlageters Hinrichtung," *VB* no. 114 (13 June 1923).

tion in the face of death, a model for all patriotic Catholics. The official NSDAP speaker at a Catholic ceremonial mass for Schlageter in the Bavarian town of Kempten, for instance, spoke not only of Schlageter's "most powerful manly discipline" but also, with allusion to the biblical virtue of childlike faith, noted that Schlageter's life and death had demonstrated "that a childlike and devout Christianity is fully compatible with relentless vigor (*rücksichtsloser Tatkraft*), and that it is in fact a deep faith that first and foremost produces unreserved fearlessness in the face of death." For Catholics in Munich the lesson to be learned from Schlageter's brief but heroic life was that his Nazi and Catholic identities were not only not in conflict, but that his religious principles were precisely what had helped make Schlageter a model Nazi: "On his final walk he was accompanied by two Catholic priests, and he showed here again before his death that the most passionate nationalism is not something that stands in contradiction to religious identity (as some jealous entities would like to portray it), but that on the contrary, it is in the passionate love of nation that religious sentiment finds its most genuine support."⁷⁴

These somewhat elusive images and ideals were translated quite skillfully into more tangible form in the commemorative activities of 10 June 1923, which included a mass demonstration in honor of Schlageter staged by a number of *völkisch* and patriotic organizations on Munich's Königsplatz and attended by between twenty and thirty thousand activists. Perhaps more important than this larger demonstration, however, which had a distinct paramilitary flavor and not much overt religious content, was the Catholic memorial mass held immediately after the demonstration in the neighboring St. Boniface Abbey, organized specifically by the NSDAP and presided over by Abbot Alban Schachleiter.⁷⁵ The decision to organize the St. Boniface ceremony had been made, according to Ernst Hanfstaengl, while Hitler was briefly vacationing in Berchtesgaden with Dietrich Eckart, Anton Drexler, and Hanfstaengl in late May or early June. Hitler, still somewhat despondent over his loss of face in the infamous "May Day" confrontation with the Bavarian authorities a few weeks previously, was not even planning to return to Munich to participate in the Königsplatz

74. "Schlageters letzte Augenblicke," *VB* no. 113 (12 June 1923); "Hochamt für Schlageter," *VB* no. 137 (10 July 1923); "Albert Leo Schlageter zum Gedächtnis," *VB* no. 112 (10/11 June 1923).

75. The Catholic nature of the St. Boniface ceremony contrasted sharply with the Protestant-nationalist orientation of the Königsplatz demonstration organized by Kriebel; significantly, the only clergyman featured as a speaker on the Königsplatz that day was the local Protestant pastor Martin Joch. The St. Boniface mass is mentioned briefly in Baird, *To Die for Germany*, 254, n. 56, but Baird confuses the name of Schachleiter the priest with the monastery in Prague he had formerly run, stating erroneously that "a memorial mass for Schlageter was performed by Abbot von Emmaus at the St. Bonifazius Kirche." Although the NSDAP did participate in the Königsplatz demonstration (and Hitler agreed to be one of the speakers), the leading organizer was Hermann Kriebel, the military head of a loose grouping of radical right-wing organizations known as the Vaterländische Kampfbünde.

demonstration being organized by Kriebel. However, when Hanfstaengl sketched out the symbolic impact that a Catholic mass for Schlageter would have on Munich's Catholic population, whom the Nazis were already so energetically courting, and suggested asking their mutual friend Schachleiter not only to eulogize Schlageter but also to consecrate the standards of the SA, Hitler was quickly won over.⁷⁶ It is unclear whether Hanfstaengl or Hitler were initially aware of it, but the fact that Schachleiter was himself an alumnus (*Alter Herr*) of Schlageter's Catholic fraternity federation, the CV, made him an even more appropriate choice to perform the memorial service.⁷⁷ Schachleiter readily agreed to their suggestions and the St. Boniface ceremony, which was attended by a broad crosssection of Munich Catholics ranging from the uniformed masses of SA men to Schlageter's CV fraternity brothers, was a resounding success for the NSDAP. Contemporary observers were struck by the stunning imagery of row after row of brightly colored SA standards marching through the entrance of St. Boniface, where Schachleiter consecrated each standard with holy water, fashioning an impressive visual union of the most sacred of Catholic and Nazi emblems.⁷⁸ Schachleiter's eulogistic sermon presented Schlageter as an equally powerful living union of Catholic and National Socialist identity, as a "martyr for the German cause" who could now "stand before the judgment seat of God as a victim of the strictest loyalty to duty." Schlageter's life in fact provided the proselytizer in Schachleiter with an occasion to call all those in attendance also to observe a "firm and unwavering faith in God," and to recognize the "one and only way forward for the German nation out of the present-day distress and affliction. That way is the return to the true faith."⁷⁹ Observers took especially keen notice of Schachleiter's impressive personal

76. Hanfstaengl described for Hitler the unforgettable impression made by the funerary ceremonies surrounding the death of Abraham Lincoln (which Hanfstaengl's American mother had witnessed as a girl), and suggested that in this case the memorial for Schlageter could be given "a solemn religious as well as patriotic flavor." He continued: "I had had the further idea of getting Abbot Schachleiter to bless the standards of the SA formations taking part in the Schlageter demonstration and had been very pleased when I got Hitler to agree to it"; *Unheard Witness*, 86–87. See also *Zwischen Weissem und Braunem Haus*, 108. On the May Day "debacle," in which Hitler was forced publicly to back down from a number of ill-advised political threats, see, e.g., Franz-Willing, *Krisenjahr*, 77–85.

77. See the hagiographic reference to Schlageter and other CV students as "the pioneers of National Socialism" in the letter from fellow CV alumnus Fritz Berthold to Schachleiter, 28 January 1934, NSDAP-HA 55/fol. 1327.

78. Hanfstaengl, *Zwischen Weissem und Braunem Haus*, 109. The VB noted the important visual role played by the SA standards: "The flag-bearers and standard-bearers stood at attention on both sides of the altar for the duration of the mass . . . During the transsubstantiation the flags and standards were lowered on both sides of the altar in obedience to the words of the priest . . . After the ceremony the parade march of the SA took place . . . a magnificent military spectacle." VB no. 113 (12 June 1923).

79. Report of Schachleiter's sermon in VB no. 113 (12 June 1923).

presence and the powerful impact of his message on the listeners present that day. Hans Hinkel, one of the young SA men who attended the mass, later attempted to convey the unforgettable force of Schachleiter's eulogy:

At the pulpit stood the powerful personality of Abbot Alban Schachleiter, who in a fiery sermon praised Albert Leo Schlageter and the significance of his struggle and death for Germany. We youths were literally transported by Schachleiter into a holy rapture (*in eine geradezu heilige Begeisterung versetzt*). We have never been able to forget this hour. It was this hour — in which this mighty preacher of God's word, this amazing human, stood there in the middle of that eager assembly — that steeled the will of our resistance to the humiliation and distress of the fatherland.⁸⁰

The significance of Schachleiter's indelible performance and his portrayal of (Catholic) religious zeal married to energetic Nazi activism is difficult to overestimate. While this significance is also difficult to quantify in terms of new membership growth for the Nazi movement, it is likely that Schlageter's exemplary image exerted a nearly irresistible pull on large numbers of young Catholic men, as evidenced by at least one very important case — that of a young and devoutly pious Catholic named Heinrich Himmler, who joined the NSDAP in the wake of Schachleiter's eulogy and whose development will be discussed in greater detail later. Importantly, the day following the Schlageter ceremony, 11 June 1923, marked the beginning of Lorenz Pieper's official speaking tour through each of the Nazi sections in Munich. This in turn occurred coincidentally with the increasing emergence of the local priest Joseph Roth, whose very public espousal of the Nazi cause would eventually lead him into one of the most influential official positions within the Reichskirchenministerium in Berlin after Hitler came to power, as an effective propagandistic voice for the Nazis.⁸¹

On 21 June 1923 the NSDAP staged a well-publicized mass meeting in the Bürgerbräukeller on the theme of "National Socialism and Christianity," which specifically raised the issue of Hitler's own religious identity, presenting him both as a model Catholic and an energetic defender of the Christian cause. Hermann Esser opened the assembly by expressing incredulity that the BVP could still dare at this point to persist in attacking the NSDAP as anti-Christian, and his introductory remarks framed the importance of the evening's topic by showcasing Hitler's allegedly active Catholicism:

80. Hans Hinkel, *Einer unter Hunderttausend* (Munich, 1938), 99.

81. See for example Roth's major three-part article series, "Katholizismus und Judentum," *VB* no. 108 (6 June 1923), no. 109 (7 June 1923), no. 110 (8 June 1923). This popular series was quickly expanded and marketed under the same title in book form by the publisher of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Franz Eher Nachf. Verlag, in August 1923. See also the advance publicity for the book; e.g., *VB* no. 151 (1 August 1923).

Our *Führer* has said to me: "It especially grieves me that I, as a Catholic, am attacked so unkindly by other Catholics [in the BVP]. This is all the more painful since there is absolutely no other movement that champions the cause of Christianity as ours does, and because I am the one whose labors are to a large degree responsible for the fact that Christianity can now blossom here so well."⁸²

While the issue of Hitler's actual religious convictions in these early years must remain open, there is considerable evidence that he at least portrayed himself as (and may well have been) still a practicing Catholic in 1923.⁸³ In addition to publicizing the issue of Hitler's Catholic identity, however, the 21 June meeting is also instructive for the contrast it points out between the roles played by Protestant pastors and Catholic priests in the early Nazi movement. The main speaker at the meeting was Georg Schott, a former Protestant clergyman from Munich who, although he had laid down his pastoral duties several years earlier, still adhered to a strongly antisemitic notion of Germanic-Protestant Christianity.⁸⁴ Since Schott was well-known in Munich, especially for his failed pre-war attempt to establish his own liberal-Protestant religious community there, his speech was clearly not aimed at winning over a Catholic audience; it is in fact quite possible that Schott's activism was intended as a Protestant counterpart to the activities of Lorenz Pieper. It is Schott's status as a *former* pastor, however, that is quite telling. While pastors from the Munich area were involved in other wings of the broader *völkisch* movement, one searches in vain for active Protestant clergy who were openly campaigning for the NSDAP or writing, either anonymously or under their own names, for the *Völkischer Beobachter*. It may also be worth noting that other Nazi activists in Munich who came from Protestant backgrounds — and here Alfred Rosenberg should be mentioned — were often explicit about the fact that they were *former* Protestants, and typically

82. "Nationalsozialismus und Christentum," *VB* no. 123 (23 June 1923).

83. Konrad Heiden notes that "Hitler . . . as of 1918 certainly still went to confession and communion" and that, after meeting Alban Schachleiter, Hitler also "received the sacraments from this National Socialist abbot"; Heiden, *Der Fuehrer* (Boston, 1944), 632. Rudolf Hess represented Hitler's Catholic faith as one of his outstanding qualities when, in attempting to arrange an initial meeting between Hitler and Gustav von Kahr, Hess wrote to Kahr: "[Hitler] is a character of rare decency and sincerity, generous in heart and religious, a good Catholic"; Hess to Kahr, 17 May 1921, cited in Deuerlein, ed., *Augenzeugenberichte*, 133. Similarly, Hitler's lawyer Lorenz Roder proclaimed publicly as late as December 1923 that "Herr Hitler is still today a convinced Catholic"; cited in Erich Kern, *Adolf Hitler und seine Bewegung* (Göttingen, 1970), 18. There is no question, however, that Hitler's ever-increasing faith in his own messianic political mission inevitably led him into a clearly anti-Christian stance once in power, as perhaps best evidenced by his "table talks" in the early 1940s.

84. Despite Schott's continued profession of Christianity, his ideas overlapped on several fronts with the Germanic religious ideology being developed by Alfred Rosenberg. On Schott, who is best known for his hagiographic *Das Volksbuch von Hitler* (Munich, 1924), see Mensing, *Pfarrer und Nationalsozialismus*, 274–75.

made no claims to represent the compatibility of Nazi and Protestant identity.⁸⁵

Throughout July and August of 1923 the NSDAP continued to grow rapidly, and there is evidence that, in addition to the party's oft-cited penchant for exploiting times of crisis for political gain, much of this growth came as a result of the Nazis' strengthened Catholic appeal in and around Munich.⁸⁶ The powerful Catholic spectacle of the St. Boniface ceremony was repeated in these months in a number of Catholic towns and cities throughout Bavaria, often eliciting uncertain responses from local church officials. A large memorial mass for Schlageter was celebrated specifically under the auspices of the Capuchin monks in Kempten, with "the SA and their standards surrounding the church both in front and behind," and in Passau a "deeply moving" Schlageter commemoration featured a torchlight procession of more than ten thousand participants through the streets of the city and the ringing of the bells of the cathedral church in Schlageter's honor. In Regensburg, however, diocesan officials created an uproar by forbidding local priests from consecrating the SA standards, and the local cathedral canon went so far as to criticize Schlageter as a terrorist, saying his "act of sabotage has placed him outside the bounds of a Christian worldview." Interestingly, in Ottobeuren — where, it was emphasized, the "party comrades are almost exclusively of the Catholic faith" — the blessing of the SA flags was also at least initially prohibited, but priests at the town's famous Benedictine monastery nonetheless proceeded with a planned SA mass and the party standards were, in the end, consecrated anyway.⁸⁷ It was also in late August that Lorenz Pieper embarked on his widely publicized tour through several

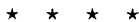
85. In contrast, a decade later the most thorough attempt to tailor Christian faith to match the imperatives of the Nazi regime in power was carried out by Protestants, most notably those in the "German Christian" movement; see Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996). Björn Mensing notes the activities of Protestant pastors in Munich like Hermann Lambert, Friedrich Langenfass, and Martin Joch in the DNVP and in local antisemitic and *völkisch* groups in the early 1920s (*Pfarrer*, 74–75), but presents no evidence of participation by them or any other pastors in the Munich NSDAP. Mensing later notes that by May 1923 Protestant pastors were playing an important role in the NSDAP in predominantly-Protestant regions in northern Bavaria (pp. 92–93), but again finds nothing like this in the areas around Munich. Though not mentioned by Mensing, Martin Joch was also one of the speakers at the larger Königsplatz demonstration in honor of Schlageter (see *VB*, no. 113 [12 June 1923]), but was there on behalf of other local *völkisch* groups, not the NSDAP.

86. The most common reasons given for the rapid growth of the NSDAP in 1923 — nationalist outrage over the French occupation of the Ruhr and despair over the monetary crisis — are of course valid, but do not in themselves explain why many Catholics chose the NSDAP over other radical rightist groups preaching similar nationalistic, economic, and antisemitic messages at the time. On the devastating cultural effects of the inflation, see Martin Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt: Revolution, Inflation und Moderne: München 1914–1924* (Munich, 1998), 319–54.

87. "Hochamt für Schlageter," *VB* no. 137 (10 July 1923); "Schlageterfeier in Passau," *VB* no. 160 (11 August 1923); "Die abgelehnte kirchliche Fahnenweihe," *VB* no. 161 (12/13 August 1923); "Deutscher Tag in Ottobeuren," *VB* no. 168 (22 August 1923).

Catholic Bavarian cities. His appearance in Straubing, where he gave the most popular of his standard propagandistic speeches (entitled "Can a Catholic be a National Socialist?"), was greeted by "wild applause" and was praised as a "resounding success" for the NSDAP. Similarly, Pieper's two major engagements at the Neues Haus in Regensburg (25 and 28 August), where he spoke on "National Socialism and Christianity" before large crowds, were "accompanied by shouts of 'Heil' and thunderous applause lasting several minutes."⁸⁸

Throughout the late summer and early fall of 1923 Joseph Roth and Philipp Haeuser also remained actively engaged in the Nazi movement. Roth traveled in early September with a large NSDAP delegation from Munich to Nuremberg to participate in the massive "German Day" demonstration staged in the heart of predominantly Protestant Franconia and organized by a wide range of right-wing and *völkisch* groups, over which the strongly anti-Catholic Erich Ludendorff exercised a decisive influence. Roth's impassioned celebration of a large-scale outdoor mass for the SA troops on a parade ground outside Nuremberg, which according to the local police observer consisted of "flaming words that sharpened the German conscience," served as further visible confirmation of the NSDAP's increasingly Catholic orientation and as such was widely publicized.⁸⁹ Haeuser remained in personal contact with Hitler at this time, continuing the campaign to further consolidate Catholic support behind the NSDAP. Quite tellingly, in October 1923 Haeuser assured Hitler of his continued fervent devotion "as one who sympathizes with and suffers alongside you," and claimed to represent the feelings of "true" Catholics when he affirmed that "you are our last, but hopefully also our strongest and most successful hope."⁹⁰ In light of the fact that the NSDAP experienced its most dramatic early growth between the spring and fall of 1923, nearly tripling in size in a matter of several months, it is quite likely that the passionate sentiments expressed in Haeuser's letter were much more widespread among Catholics than Hitler's opponents in the BVP were willing to admit.



Before turning to the events and developments over the next several months that brought about the widespread estrangement of Catholics from the Nazi

88. "Kann ein Katholik Nationalsozialist sein?" *VB* no. 170 (24 August 1923). For a report on the speech of 25 August, see "Aus der Bewegung," *VB* no. 173 (28 August 1923); Pieper's 28 August speech at the Neues Haus was advertised in *VB* no. 172 (26/27 August 1923).

89. "Bericht des Staatspolizeiamtes Nürnberg-Fürth vom 9.18.1923," in Ernst Deuerlein, ed., *Der Hitler-Putsch: Bayerische Dokumente zum 8./9. November 1923* (Stuttgart, 1963), Dok. 6, p. 170. Werner Maser mentions Roth's sermon in passing but does not draw any larger conclusions from it; Maser, *Frühgeschichte*, 421.

90. Philipp Haeuser to Hitler, 14 October 1923, NSDAP-HA 53/fol. 1242.

movement, let us pause at this point — in the fall of 1923, when there is little doubt that large numbers of believing Catholics belonged to the NSDAP — and consider the factors that may have contributed to this level of Catholic involvement. As previously noted, the walls of the confessional milieu seem to have been especially porous in Munich, as evidenced in part by the fact that Catholic support for political Catholicism in Munich (and Upper Bavaria more generally) had been the lowest of any Catholic region in the Reich since the late 1890s. Within this climate, by hiding initially behind vague notions of “positive Christianity” and “religious Catholicism,” the NSDAP was for some time able to appease the anti-Christian elements within its ranks while still presenting itself as genuinely Christian. The visibility of the Catholic priests who came forward in 1923 to campaign for the NSDAP in and around Munich, as well as the increased focus on religious prayers and attendance at masses, served as confirmation that the positive Christian stance of the Nazi movement made it indeed a hospitable environment for believing Catholics. This conviction was also likely reinforced by the visible contrast between the NSDAP and a number of other *völkisch* organizations, which often espoused outright pagan/Germanic religious ideals (from which the Nazis on more than one occasion distanced themselves) or represented more of an expressly Protestant-nationalist orientation, as evidenced in part by the participation of Protestant pastors in Munich in other wings of the *völkisch* movement and their striking absence from the early NSDAP.

But it is also worth raising the question whether there were specific ideals or beliefs represented by the Nazis that not only enabled but may in some cases have almost compelled Catholics to look to Hitler and his movement with the hope and devotion expressed, for example, by Philipp Haeuser. Certainly the central element in the somewhat hazy ideational universe of the early Nazi movement was the concept of race, and especially the relentless demonization of the Jew and his influence on German society, which was often given a reassuringly “Catholic” flavor in Nazi imagery. There is little doubt that an increasingly modern form of Catholic antisemitism had developed deep roots in nineteenth-century Bavaria, and was accelerated in Munich in the wake of the First World War by the brutal Soviet regime.⁹¹ Both Cardinal Faulhaber and influential pro-BVP priests like Erhard Schlund represented the battle against the corrosive influence of the Jews as a central aspect of the Catholic mission, although both were uneasy with extreme forms of racial antisemitism and thus pointed (somewhat meekly) to the need to keep this battle within the bounds

91. Zvi Bacharach, “Das Bild der Juden in katholischen Predigten des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Geschichte und Kultur der Juden in Bayern*, ed. Manfred Tremel and Josef Kirmeyer (Munich, 1988), 312–20; Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus*, 135–37; Joachimsthaler, *Hitlers Weg*, 247–48.

of Christian charity.⁹² In the wake of the radicalizing effects of defeat and revolution, this ambiguous stance not only made the Nazis' extreme message more respectable but, perhaps more importantly, allowed the NSDAP to portray its racial program as the principled and logical conclusion of what many Catholic leaders claimed to believe but were too hypocritical (or too blinded by political opportunism) to act upon.⁹³ In effect, the NSDAP was able quite skillfully to portray its antisemitic mission as the outgrowth of an essentially Catholic worldview, packaging it in a form that was both uncompromising and unencumbered by the "respectability" maintained by Faulhaber and the BVP.

Important insight into the connections between the antisemitism of the early Nazi movement and the distinctly Catholic universe within which it circulated can be gained by looking briefly at an important and often overlooked work by Dietrich Eckart entitled *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin*, written in 1923 and based on private conversations between Hitler and his mentor Eckart over the course of that important year.⁹⁴ The text, which attempts to equate international Jewry with godless bolshevism and to trace the pernicious influence of these two forces throughout history, has been cited as a rare and important early clue to the development of Hitler's rabid antisemitism. But while the undeni-

92. Erhard Schlund openly labeled the Jews "racial aliens" (*Rassenfremde*) and proclaimed that loyal Catholics could in good conscience be "united with the antisemites in distress over the increasing influence of Jewry, especially in Germany, and in the desire to see this influence restricted"; Schlund, *Katholizismus und Vaterland: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Munich, 1923), 33. Typically, however, Schlund prefaced these remarks by distancing himself from "fanatical" racism, warning against an exaggerated "hatred of all that is not German or Aryan"; *ibid.*, 32. Faulhaber, for his part, also spoke out against "racial fanaticism" but generally left undefined the point at which the laudable mission against Jewish influence became fanaticism. In contrast, Faulhaber's famous remarks at the 1922 *Katholikentag* in Munich were quite clear — labeling the 1918 revolution and the republic it spawned as "perjury and high treason, which will remain throughout history hereditarily defective (*erblich belastet*) and tainted with the mark of Cain," while also denouncing the related influence of the "Jewish press in Berlin" in contrast to the nobility of "Catholics of the racially-pure sort" (*Katholiken reinrassiger Art*). These statements were so extreme that Konrad Adenauer, the president of that year's *Katholikentag*, was forced publicly to disavow them; see Hugo Stehkämper, *Konrad Adenauer als Katholikentagspräsident 1922* (Mainz, 1977), and the jubilant coverage of Faulhaber's antisemitic remarks in *VB* no. 69 (30 August, 1922); *VB* no. 70 (2 September 1922); "Rom und Juda," *VB* no. 76 (23 September 1922); "Das Zentrum und Juda," *VB* no. 79 (4 October 1922).

93. It should be noted that while the Nazis relentlessly pilloried the alleged opportunism of the BVP and Center Party, the essentially nonpolitical figure of Faulhaber was rarely (if ever) openly disparaged before late 1923.

94. The book was still unfinished at the time of Eckart's death in December 1923 but was completed from his notes and published posthumously in early 1924 as *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin: Zwiegespräch zwischen Adolf Hitler und mir* (Munich, 1924). Eckart's influence over Hitler up through 1923 is difficult to overstate. Not only was Eckart the bard of the early movement (he also coined the party's catchphrase "Deutschland erwache!") but Hitler always credited Eckart as his intellectual father and, famously, ended the second volume of *Mein Kampf* with a dedication to "that man who, as one of the best, by words and by thoughts and finally by deeds, dedicated his life to the awakening of his and our nation, Dietrich Eckart"; *Mein Kampf* (Boston, 1939), 993.

able main thrust of the book is a crude and unpolished diatribe against the Jews, one is struck at the same time by the outspokenness of the Catholic vision of its two protagonists.⁹⁵ After a rambling pseudo-historical discussion of the immorality and depravity of the Jews ranging from the brutalities of the Old Testament Israelites through the 1871 Paris Commune and up to the recent Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Eckart and Hitler come at last to what they consider to be one of the most villainous of all the treacheries of the Jews: the surreptitious poisoning of the true Catholic-Christian spirit, which culminated ultimately in the tragic confessional division that had so scarred recent German history and that continued to turn German against German, making the current political system in Germany so susceptible to the machinations of the Jews.

While certainly not exempting the Catholic Church from harsh criticism, asserting in typical Nazi fashion that a "Jewish spirit" had in many respects crept into the church over the centuries, Eckart and Hitler were careful to couch their critique in language that emphasized their own continued and seemingly incontestable loyalty to the Catholic faith, whose eternal essence was contrasted to the fallible earthly vessels through which it was transmitted.⁹⁶ In contrast, the Protestant Reformation was portrayed as the ultimate diabolical tool of international Jewry, whose goal had been to destroy the unity of Christendom and to fatally divide the German *Völk*. While continuing to pay homage to Luther as a Germanic hero, Hitler and Eckart made no secret of their quite traditional Catholic convictions, laying the blame for the "Jewish triumph" squarely on the shortsightedness of Luther's initial reforming zeal:

It is the most terrible tragedy that Luther bears the responsibility for such a dreadful development . . . The greatest German the unsuspecting cause of the German collapse; Luther, the mighty opponent of the Jews, the one who most disastrously paved the way for them — incomprehensible, I tell you, incomprehensible . . . If only he had recognized [the Jewish danger] in his youth! Then he would not have attacked Catholicism, but rather the Jews in the background! Instead of condemning the church across the board, he

95. Since the book did not appear until early 1924, at which point Catholic support for the Nazi cause was already dissolving, its importance in this context lies primarily in its revelation of the extent to which a broader Catholic vision, often otherwise unspoken because of its pervasiveness, underlay the early Nazi movement. The work was first recovered from almost complete obscurity by Ernst Nolte, "Eine frühe Quelle zu Hitlers Antisemitismus," *Historische Zeitschrift* 192 (1961): 584–606. Nolte argues for the authenticity of the text (as Hitler's own words), a view accepted by Friedrich Heer, *Glaube*, 204. For a dissenting view, see Plewnia, 101–10. Klaus Scholder mentions the importance of the book but downplays its essentially Catholic nature; Scholder, *Kirchen*, 112–13.

96. "Let us take just one example: the selling of indulgences. The very essence of the Jewish spirit. We are both Catholics, but dare we not say it? . . . We say this precisely *because* we are Catholics. [The selling of indulgences] had nothing to do with Catholicism. Catholicism itself, we know, would have remained intact even if half the hierarchy had been Jewish"; *Bolschewismus*, 30.

would have let the whole of his passionate force fall on the true *Dunkelmänner* . . . It would never have come to the division of the church, nor to the war which, in accordance with the wishes of the Hebrews, spilled Aryan blood in torrents for thirty years.⁹⁷

Importantly, Hitler and Eckart were not content merely to lament the historical reality of the Reformation and its consequences, but attempted also to present a positive vision of genuine Catholic revival which, by destroying the power of international Jewry, would ultimately bring about the reversal of the Reformation and the overcoming of the confessional divide. Eckart recorded Hitler as making the prophetic pronouncement: "Rome will get its act together (*wird sich ermannen*), but only when we get our act together first. Only the profundity of the German [nation] can open the eyes of the world. A second Hildebrand will appear, one who is even greater, and will separate the wheat from the chaff. And one day it will be said: the division of the church (*Kirchenspaltung*) is over."⁹⁸ Whether Hitler yet saw himself at this early date as just such a "second Hildebrand" is a matter for speculation, but these passages make clear that Hitler and Eckart envisioned the reunion of the Christian confessions taking place under the aegis of an antisemitic Catholic renewal beginning in the German-speaking lands and spreading outward from there. The reader is led to the ultimate conclusion that the Nazis' ruthless battle against the forces of international Jewry and Marxism (along with their allegedly traitorous allies and agents in the BVP and Center Party) was itself part and parcel of this larger, Catholic-oriented, vision of racial and religious renewal. Consistent reference to antisemitic utterances of heroes from the Catholic past, especially Thomas Aquinas, John Chrysostom, and even Jesus Christ (who chased the Jewish moneylenders out of the temple and so was praised as "the quintessence of manliness"), bolstered the image that the Nazi racial program was, at least in part, a religious crusade.⁹⁹ And to further underscore the centrality of this religious component, the book itself was specifically marketed by the publisher, in a special afterword, as a clear indication of the "Christian orientation of the *völkisch* movement."¹⁰⁰

97. *Ibid.*, 35–36.

98. *Ibid.*, 31. Hildebrand, as Gregory VII, was pope from 1073 to 1085 and presided over a remarkably wide-ranging reform of the church. His apparent strength and decisiveness were immortalized in his dramatic (if temporary) symbolic triumph over the Emperor Henry IV at Canossa in 1076.

99. *Ibid.*, 26–27, 36 (quote from 36).

100. *Ibid.*, 50. It is, as previously noted, quite difficult to divine exactly what Hitler's own personal religious convictions were in these early years; it is also, again, nearly impossible to ascertain the degree to which the words and ideas in *Der Bolschewismus* were exclusively Hitler's own. What is certain, however, is that Hitler did nothing to distance himself from these ideas when the book was published shortly after Eckart's death. Klaus Scholder, however, interprets Hitler's silence as evidence of possible disagreement with the ideas of Eckart; *Kirchen*, 112.

These overarching ideals were consistent with much of the NSDAP propaganda aimed at Munich's Catholics in the early 1920s, and confirm also the somewhat surprising extent to which the early Nazi message was shaped by Catholic influences. The *Völkischer Beobachter*, for instance, in a programmatic article strongly criticizing the tendency in other wings of the *völkisch* movement to dismiss Catholic Christianity as semitically-tainted and therefore inferior, demanded a loyal yet radical reform of the Catholic Church in Germany that would rid it of all Jewish influence and all "racially inferior impurities" (including especially the ultramontane politicians of the BVP!) and called for a new Bernard of Clairvaux to rise up and lead a sweeping antisemitic German Catholic revival.¹⁰¹ This radical crusading imagery and almost missionary zeal were frequent motifs in the early Nazi movement and likely exercised a distinct appeal in Munich, where, as previously noted, antisemitic fervor was already high and esteem for political Catholicism especially low even among practicing Catholics. To eliminate whatever religious reservations may have existed in the Catholic populace regarding the radicality of the Nazis' brand of racial antisemitism, activist priests like Joseph Roth and Lorenz Pieper were tireless in their insistence that it was not only permissible but in fact the duty of all German Catholics to join the Nazi religio-racial crusade. Roth was especially vehement in defending the "Christian" nature of racial antisemitism, claiming that it was not enough simply to attack the cultural manifestations of Jewish influence — since "the [Jewish] frame of mind is determined primarily by blood" — and concluding that "the Jewish race must be eliminated from public life, because it exercises as a result of its nature such an enervating influence on our religion and our race." Roth also warned against the false and hypocritical application (on the part of the Nazis' critics) of the biblical command to love one's neighbors, demanding instead the uncompromising persecution of the Jews as an entire race, and portraying this racial crusade as being in accordance with Church teaching even if it meant that some individual "good" Jews, "among whom the hereditary immorality is only latent," would have to suffer along with the rest. In attempting to remove yet another potential Catholic objection, Roth claimed that "Catholic antisemitism is completely compatible with the adherence of the Catholic Church to the canonical writings of the Old Testament," since the church taught that Christianity grew originally out of the Jewish faith in God, not out of specific characteristics of the Jewish race.¹⁰²

Similarly, Lorenz Pieper emphasized the harmonious relationship between Catholic dogma and the "active Christianity" (*Tatchristentum*) said to

101. E. Dietrich, "Arisches Glaubenstum," *VB* no. 4 (13 January 1921).

102. Roth, "Katholizismus und Judentum," *VB* no. 108 (6 June 1923), no. 109 (7 June 1923), no. 110 (8 June 1923).

characterize the Nazi movement, insisting that "since the NSDAP stands on the foundation of positive Christianity both theoretically and practically, it goes without saying that its Catholic members should identify themselves fully with all the dogmas and moral laws of the Catholic Church." But Pieper's primary focus was also on winning Catholics over to the Nazi racial campaign, declaring in the favorite of his standard stump speeches that "a convinced Christian and Catholic *must* be an antisemite." Pieper clearly meant this in the sense of the Nazis' racial antisemitism, proclaiming further that, in light of the God-ordained differences between the races, it was a specifically religious imperative for German Catholics to keep the national bloodstream pure from the Jewish contagion, a fact that made participation in the Nazi racial crusade not only far from un-Christian but rather a command of God.¹⁰³

The movement's rapid growth seems to indicate that large numbers of Catholics did indeed feel compelled to obey this command. If Heinrich Held was right, in his aforementioned early-October letter to Cardinal Faulhaber, to express concern over the large numbers of Catholics who had joined the Nazi movement in the course of 1923, his claim that they were doing so blindly and naively, "not knowing the end to which they are being misused," is considerably less certain. What is certain, in any event, is that larger developments would soon dramatically intervene and would, in many ways, permanently alter the nature of Catholic support for the Nazi movement in Munich.

The Falling Out: The *Völkisch* War on Catholicism

The political events of late 1923 and early 1924 in Munich are fairly well known. On the night of 8 November and the morning of 9 November 1923 the NSDAP, as part of a larger *völkisch* coalition known as the Kampfbund, attempted to seize control of the Bavarian state, with the ultimate goal of organizing a march on Berlin to topple the government there and to erect an ultra-nationalist dictatorship in place of the hated republic. This attempt — known as the "Beer Hall Putsch," since the Kampfbund's first move was to abduct the primary leaders of the Bavarian government during a political rally in a local beer hall — failed miserably, ending in a gun battle in one of Munich's central squares that resulted in the deaths of sixteen members of the Kampfbund and

103. "Kann ein Katholik Nationalsozialist sein?" *VB* no. 170 (24 August 1923). Pieper's 25 August 1923 speech entitled "Nationalsozialismus und Religion" closed with the clarion call: "*Völkgenossen* (compatriots) must be *Blutgenossen* (racial comrades), and the Jews are not German *Blutgenossen*. God himself desired that there be racial differences, or he would not have created them. But since God does desire these differences, it is the duty of each race to keep itself pure from foreign pollutants (*von Fremdkörpern rein zu halten*). Therefore antisemitism is not un-Christian, but rather a command!" *VB* no. 173 (28 August 1923).

four Munich police officers.¹⁰⁴ The NSDAP and the *Völkischer Beobachter* were promptly banned, while Hitler and the other major Putsch conspirators, including most prominently Erich Ludendorff (who in recent months had come to exercise an increasing influence over the NSDAP), were arrested and in early 1924 were tried for treason in a genuine “celebrity trial” that was covered exhaustively in the press throughout Germany. Whereas Hitler accepted full responsibility and used the trial as a pulpit from which to publicize his and the movement’s message to its broadest audience yet, Ludendorff attempted to shift the blame onto others and perceived in the trial an eagerly-awaited opportunity to attack the Catholic Church and, more specifically, the person of Cardinal Faulhaber, whom he blamed for betraying the Putsch. When the verdicts were read in early April 1924 Ludendorff was acquitted, Hitler and the others received token prison sentences, and the ban on the NSDAP remained in effect (only to be lifted in February 1925, after Hitler’s release from prison).

Despite initial evidence of the continued popularity of the Nazi successor groupings in the immediate aftermath of the trial, during the course of 1924 the increasingly divided movement slid steadily into greater and greater decline, entering the period often referred to in histories of the Nazi Party as the “wilderness years” that preceded the party’s dramatic rise to national prominence in the early 1930s. The most frequently cited causes of this decline — organizational disunity and inept leadership in Hitler’s absence combined with the increased stability of the years 1924–1929, which dispersed much of the atmosphere of crisis on which the NSDAP thrived — are certainly applicable.¹⁰⁵ However, as will be seen, the demise of the Nazi movement was also due in no small part to a groundswell of vehement anti-Catholicism that swept through the larger *völkisch* movement, including large segments of the former NSDAP itself. This groundswell cost the movement most of its Catholic support in Munich, and there is evidence that many of the Catholics who did remain in the movement did so from then on often at the expense of their Catholic identity.

The decisive phase was entered, somewhat unwittingly, in September 1923 when the NSDAP, in joining the so-called Kampfbund that had been formed at the aforementioned “German Day” demonstration in Nuremberg, allowed the enticing prospect of concerted revolutionary action to override its previous policy of maintaining strict organizational independence from other *völkisch* entities.¹⁰⁶ Between September and early November, then, the Nazi Party

104. See Franz-Willing, *Putsch und Verbotszeit*, 66–131; Gordon, *Putsch*, 270–409; Maser, *Frügeschichte*, 443–64.

105. David Jablonsky, *The Nazi Party in Dissolution: Hitler and the Verbotszeit, 1923–1925* (London, 1989), 53–128.

106. The NSDAP had, however, participated in a looser grouping of *völkisch* organizations known as the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* earlier in 1923; see Maser, *Frügeschichte*, 377–80.

officially became but one of the radical organizations that comprised the Kampfbund.¹⁰⁷ One unmistakable result of this absorption was the increased influence over the NSDAP of the rabidly anti-Catholic Erich Ludendorff, who had come to Munich in 1920 and whose military prestige made his home in the suburb of Solln a magnet for a wide variety of *völkisch* activists, but who had also for some time remained distant from the local Nazi movement itself.¹⁰⁸ Ludendorff was by far the Kampfbund's most prestigious and visible symbol on the national level, and his influence began to be seen clearly in the fall of 1923 in the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, which by then had come under the editorial guidance of the ambitious (and also strongly anti-Catholic) Alfred Rosenberg.¹⁰⁹ In one programmatic front-page article in particular Ludendorff acknowledged the existence of widespread unease in Catholic Munich over the outspokenness of his Prusso-Protestant identity, but insisted that his public political confession was loyally "*deutschvölkisch*" and nothing else. At the same time he did not shy away from reaffirming that he would always remain proud of his family's "*protestantisch-hohenzollerisch*" background and, in regard to his stance toward Bavarian Catholicism, proclaimed that "without question I declare my loyalty to the Protestant confession in which I was baptized and raised."¹¹⁰ As a perceptive critic noted with reference to the fall of 1923, "the antipathy within the movement toward the Catholic Church grows to the extent that the influence of Ludendorff and other north German Protestants grows."¹¹¹

107. Aside from the NSDAP the leading radical groups in the Kampfbund were Bund Oberland, led by Friedrich Weber, and the Reichskriegsflagge under Ernst Röhm (incidentally, both Röhm and Weber were Protestant); see Deuerlein, *Hitlerputsch*, 488. The Nazi SA in particular came under the increased control of Hermann Kriebel (also Protestant), who had been appointed overall military leader of the Kampfbund.

108. Bruno Thoss, *Der Ludendorff-Kreis 1919–1923: München als Zentrum der mitteleuropäischen Gegenrevolution zwischen Revolution und Hitler-Putsch* (Munich, 1987), 249–61.

109. Dietrich Eckart's name remained on the masthead as editor until late August 1923; he died some 4 months later. Rosenberg had probably taken over most of the editorial duties in spring 1923, at which time Eckart was lying low for health reasons and to evade a warrant for his arrest (on charges of making libelous statements against President Ebert); Plewnia, *Eckart*, 88. Plewnia, however, also accepts (wrongly, in my opinion) Rosenberg's claim that his own ascendancy at the VB signified the end of Eckart's influence over Hitler and the movement as early as March of 1923. On the contrary, when Hitler took a secluded vacation in early June 1923 he chose Eckart as his companion, and Eckart was centrally involved in the initial planning of the St. Boniface ceremony for Schlageter; see Hanfstaengl, *Unheard Witness*, 83–87; Hanfstaengl, *Zwischen Weissem und Braunem Haus*, 106–10.

110. "Ludendorffs völkisches Bekenntnis," VB no. 195 (22 September 1923). Ludendorff's increased visibility in the VB can also be seen, for example, in the large front-page portrait of Ludendorff, VB no. 202 (30 September 1923); "Die Ludendorffhetze der Bayer. Volkspartei," and "Ein Hebräer als Verleumder General Ludendorffs," VB no. 211 (18 October 1923). It was also, significantly, Ludendorff who wrote the movement's last programmatic ideological statement before the Putsch: "Die völkische Bewegung," VB no. 223 (1 November 1923).

111. Erhard Schlund, *Neugermanisches Heidentum im heutigen Deutschland* (Munich, 1924), 63.

Rising discontent among Catholic supporters of the NSDAP over the influence of Ludendorff and other *völkisch* anti-Catholics in the movement became increasingly visible throughout October and early November, as evidenced at least in part by the energetic publicistic campaign waged against Ludendorff by the strongly pro-Nazi priest Bernhard Stempfle in the pages of the *Miesbacher Anzeiger*.¹¹² Importantly, Dietrich Eckart himself had become almost completely estranged from the new direction taken by the movement by the fall of 1923; he even toyed openly with the idea of reviving his previous antisemitic journal *Auf gut deutsch*, since he felt his ideas were being ignored by Hitler and Ludendorff and that he had been effectively "shut out" of the *Völkischer Beobachter*.¹¹³ Significantly, also, it was in late October 1923 that Lorenz Pieper left Munich and his Nazi propagandistic activities to take over a small parish in the Westphalian town of Wehrden. Pieper later suggested that he had wanted to stay longer in Munich, but that the Jesuits had "discovered" his location, apparently in early October, and gave Pieper's address to his ecclesiastical superiors in Paderborn who then ordered him to leave Munich and resume his priestly duties under threat of suspension.¹¹⁴ This account is less than convincing, if for no other reason than that Pieper's activities in Munich were so visible and so widely covered in the press over the course of several months that there was little need for him to be "discovered" by the Jesuits. It is not unlikely, in fact, that Pieper's departure may have been a sign of unhappiness with the increased influence of Ludendorff and his adherents and, especially, with the change in the party's focus that it signified. Hitler's important decision to accept the position of political leader of the Kampfbund in late September, and the larger implications that came with it, had made clear not only that Hitler was now casting his political sights far beyond the confines of Munich but meant also that he was left with little or no time for membership drives or other organizational issues within the NSDAP itself.¹¹⁵ Hitler's energies in the fall of 1923 were consumed by the plot to overthrow both the Bavarian government and the "traitorous" regime in Berlin.

In the wake of the bloody gun battle that ended the ill-fated Putsch on 9 November 1923, disillusion and frustration over the failure of the attempted coup propelled a violent outbreak of anti-Catholic venom that engulfed the ranks of the Kampfbund movement. Importantly, with both Hitler and the

112. Stempfle's criticism of Ludendorff brought about a loud denunciation from Alfred Rosenberg; see, e.g., "Der Stempfle enthüllt sich!" *VB* no. 225 (4/5 November 1923).

113. See Eckart's October 1923 letter to Max Amann, cited in Joachimsthaler, *Hitlers Weg*, 279.

114. Tröster, "Eigenart," 54. Pieper also claimed that a reluctant Hitler encouraged him to follow the directive of his superiors, saying that "a suspended priest is of no use to me anyway."

115. Kershaw, *Hubris*, 199–200; Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party, 1919–1933* (London, 1971), 43–44. Hitler announced his decision to accept the Kampfbund position in "An alle Parteimitglieder!" *VB* no. 198 (26 September 1923).

ailing (and increasingly marginalized) Eckart in police custody, and with Lorenz Pieper freshly installed in his new parish hundreds of miles away, the primary orchestrators of the Catholic-oriented membership drive that had helped shape the face of the NSDAP in Munich over the previous spring and summer were effectively out of commission and in no position to direct events as they developed.¹¹⁶ And events developed quickly — especially at the university, which became the primary center of *völkisch* unrest. A major demonstration was staged on 12 November in the main university building to protest the violent quashing of the Putsch by the authorities and, although the protest rally had originally been convened by the leader of one of the university's largest exclusively Catholic fraternity groups, the assembly quickly degenerated into a morass of wild rumors and crass insults that were leveled especially at Cardinal Faulhaber. It was alleged that Faulhaber, who was widely rumored to have been spearheading his own separatist plot to create a new south-German "Danubian monarchy," had performed the act that decisively doomed the Putsch only hours after it began, by having met secretly with Gustav von Kahr, the legal head of the Bavarian government, to convince him to reverse the statement of support for the new Hitler/Ludendorff dictatorship he had initially made while in custody at the beer hall. Among the more humorous accusations made were the charges that a Jewish-Catholic conspiracy, apparently orchestrated by Faulhaber, had actually succeeded in getting Kahr to reverse himself by bribing him with "seven Persian rugs" and the promise of honorary membership in the Jesuit order. As a result, the chant that echoed throughout the rally was "Down with Kahr and Faulhaber, the Jesuit lackeys (*Jesuitenknechte*)."¹¹⁷

Accusations of treachery were further embellished and expanded over the coming weeks and months to apply at least in principle to all believing Catholics, who were frequently lumped together as potential traitors to the *völkisch* cause. The distinction between religious and political Catholicism, so often emphasized on previous occasions, was almost completely eclipsed in the

116. Additionally, Hitler had somewhat curiously appointed perhaps the least charismatic figure in the NSDAP, Alfred Rosenberg (who was also one of the least popular among Catholics), to be interim leader of the party in Hitler's absence; Franz-Willing, *Putsch und Verbotszeit*, 193. It has often been suggested that Hitler did this to ensure that the movement would essentially die in his absence, thus eliminating potentially dangerous rivals and facilitating the eventual reassertion of Hitler's personal and complete control over the movement after his release from prison; but see also Kershaw, *Hitler*, 225.

117. See "Die Novembervorgänge an der Münchener Universität," *Academia: Monatsschrift des CV der katholischen deutschen Studentenverbindungen* 36, no. 8 (15 December 1923): 17–18. While this account admits that a Catholic fraternity leader called the rally, it contends that his original plans were altered and that the rally was essentially hijacked by *völkisch* elements from outside the university. For a Catholic condemnation of the behavior of Catholic fraternity members, see Erhard Schlund, "Münchener Universitäts-Studenten und der 12. November," *Augsburger Postzeitung*, no. 295 (25 December 1923).

flood of invective. In a widely publicized pro-Ludendorff speech to university students in late November, for instance, Albrecht Hoffmann went beyond simple anti-ultramontane rhetoric to define, in almost apocalyptic terms, the mission of the *völkisch* movement in terms that essentially excluded Catholics: "We are presently in the ultimate battle for our national existence. Bismarck's legacy, and much else along with it, has already been shamefully squandered. Now the legacy of Luther, who restored to us Germans . . . our very existence from the domination of Rome, is [in danger of] being destroyed." As the ultimate example of treason against the German *Volk*, Hoffmann pointed to the fateful manipulation of Kahr by sinister Catholic forces during the Putsch: "It was reserved for the Protestant Kahr, in destroying the *völkisch* freedom movement, to betray Luther's accomplishment into the hands of Rome with a Judas-kiss."¹¹⁸ Another of Ludendorff's adherents flatly proclaimed that "peace with the church is as unthinkable as peace with France."¹¹⁹ Certainly throughout the month of March, Ludendorff's attacks during his trial against the pope, the Catholic Church, and (especially) Cardinal Faulhaber were front page news in the Munich press.¹²⁰ The *völkisch* campaign against Catholicism, however, was not limited to words and speeches. Faulhaber's residence was attacked on several occasions in the weeks and months following the Putsch and, in one quite memorable case, an unnamed "prominent lady of Munich society," who in the course of her charitable work had occasion to pay a visit to Faulhaber, was accosted and "spit upon from head to toe" by unknown assailants as she waited at the front door of the archepiscopal residence.¹²¹

The vehemence of the attacks on Faulhaber, who had previously been treated with a good degree of respect by the *völkisch* movement and especially by the NSDAP (in stark contrast, of course, to the politicians and priests of the BVP), brought forth a corresponding wave of support for the beleaguered cardinal

118. Albrecht Hoffmann, *Der 9. November im Lichte der völkischen Freiheitsbewegung: Vortrag gehalten vor Studierenden der Universität München am 21. November 1923* (Munich, 1924), 15.

119. Cited in "Religionskrieg," *Bayerischer Kurier* no. 58 (27 February 1924). This statement was made by a *völkisch* activist named Born in a speech before a branch of the *Evangelischer Bund* in Nuremberg on 21 February 1924. On the activities of Born see also the accounts in *Bayerische Volkszeitung* no. 47 (23 February 1924) and "Kein Born der Weisheit," *Das Bayerische Vaterland* no. 54 (4 March 1924).

120. For Ludendorff's incendiary comments, see L. Gruchmann and R. Weber, eds., *Der Hitler-Prozess 1924: Wortlaut der Hauptverhandlung vor dem Volksgericht München I* (Munich, 1997), 262, 1057, 1183–84. Furthering the popular Catholic-Jewish conspiracy theory, the defense lawyer for Friedrich Weber, Dr. Alfred Holl, charged during the trial that the Putsch had been betrayed at least in part by the attempt to establish "the hegemony of the Catholic Church, [which] could only succeed through the support of international Jewry"; *ibid.*, 1314.

121. See "Patriotismus 'der Tat'," *Bayerischer Kurier* no. 48 (18 February 1924). Special police protection for Faulhaber's residence was ordered by Bavarian Kultusminister Franz Matt; see Matt to Franz Schweyer, 13 February 1924, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BHS) MInn-73548.

among Munich Catholics. In early December 1923 an ad hoc entity calling itself the Central Committee of Munich Catholics (Zentralkomitee der Münchener Katholiken) was formed by local engineer Johann Rauch to organize the defense of both Cardinal Faulhaber and the honor of the church more generally, consisting of many leading BVP figures but also representing a fairly broad cross section of Munich Catholic society. On 11 December 1923 the committee petitioned the Bavarian minister-president himself to intervene on behalf of the church in what was being portrayed increasingly as a new Kulturkampf.¹²² Over the next several months the committee also spearheaded a massive press campaign in numerous local papers that explicitly utilized Kulturkampf imagery, attempting to convince Catholics who had previously been involved in the Kampfbund movement (and especially the NSDAP) that the movement's true anti-Catholic colors were at last being revealed.¹²³ Additionally, throughout early 1924 a number of large-scale rallies were organized by the committee to demonstrate Catholic sympathy and support for Faulhaber. The largest of these occurred on 10 April 1924 in the Löwenbräukeller, at which a unified "pledge of loyalty to the church and to the leaders of the Catholic populace, especially to Cardinal Dr. von Faulhaber" was declared "without a single objection" from the Catholics present.¹²⁴ As in the case of persecuted bishops during the nineteenth-century Kulturkampf, the *völkisch* campaign against Faulhaber seems to have made him increasingly into a heroic martyr figure and an integrative rallying point for Catholics of varying political hues, many of whom had previously been bitterly divided.

In particular, in the early months of 1924, there were attempts to portray the symbolic valence of Faulhaber as a religious (not political) figure in terms that would be increasingly attractive to *völkisch* Catholics, and aimed especially at those from the former NSDAP itself. In a well-publicized speech to a Catholic academic group on 15 February 1924 Faulhaber, in stark contrast to the bitterness of Hitler's outspoken political critics in the BVP, issued a remarkably strong statement of praise for what he portrayed as the loyally Catholic political vision that had been represented by Hitler before the Putsch, lamenting the fact that

122. Johann Rauch to Knilling, 11 December 1923, Staatsarchiv München (SAM), Polizeidirektion-6687. See also *Bayerischer Kurier* no. 345 (12 December 1923), and "Zurückweisung der Angriffe gegen den Kardinal," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* no. 28 (29 January 1924).

123. There are dozens of clippings from this campaign in both the Munich police files (SAM/PD-6687) and in the Nazi party archive (NSDAP-HA 64/fol. 1466) that refer explicitly to *völkisch* activism in terms of a new Kulturkampf. The most memorable of these articles dramatized its point by featuring a picture of a Nazi dagger, with a swastika on the handle, severing a row of rosary beads and plunging through a Bible; "Sind die Deutschvölkischen kirchenfeindlich?" *Bayerischer Kurier*, no. 87 (27 March 1924).

124. "Bericht über die am 10.4.24 stattgefundene Protestkundgebung der Münchener Katholiken," SAM/PD-6687.

the "initially pure spring" that fed the NSDAP's early activism had come to be "poisoned" by the anti-Catholic influence of Ludendorff:

Adolf Hitler knew better than his rivals for leadership within the *völkisch* movement that German history did not begin in 1870 or 1517, that for the rebuilding of the German *Volk* the power source (*Kraftquelle*) of Christian culture is indispensable, and that this work of rebuilding cannot be accomplished through the worship of Germanic gods (*Wötenskult*) or through hatred of Rome. As a man of the people he knew the soul of the South German populace better than the others and recognized that the soul of the people cannot be won over by a movement that at the same time battles against the church. There is a shocking tragedy in the fact that this initially pure spring came to be poisoned by subsequent influences and [turned into] a *Kulturkampf*.¹²⁵

Such a clear statement from no less than a cardinal of Faulhaber's stature amounted in effect to a powerful endorsement of the religious legitimacy of the Catholic-oriented crusade that had helped fuel the party's growth in 1923, while also pointing out to Catholics who may have earlier been drawn to the NSDAP that those better days, now poisoned, were irretrievably gone. Similarly, while the speakers at the pro-Faulhaber rally on 10 April made no secret of their anger at Ludendorff, the organizer of the rally, Johann Rauch, paid Hitler an important (if underhanded) compliment, distinguishing the Nazi leader and his "healthy" movement from the influence of Ludendorff and implying that the current explosion of anti-Catholicism was the regrettable result of Hitler's lack of control over the movement.¹²⁶

At the same time, divisions based on religious identity continued to grow within the former Kampfbund movement itself, making continued participation increasingly difficult to reconcile with active Catholic faith. One influential activist, for instance, issued a warning against the potential treachery of the Catholic priests who remained in the movement: "Do not be deceived even if Catholic priests deliver fiery sermons at military events. Remember that there are no greater actors than these 'Jesuits'." The same speaker even attempted to wrench the powerful symbol of Albert Leo Schlageter away from *völkisch* Catholics, claiming that "Schlageter in reality went to Valhalla, which is much better than the heaven of these [Catholic] bloodsuckers."¹²⁷ Even Hitler and the

125. This speech was later published under the title *Deutsches Ehrgefühl und katholisches Gewissen* (Munich, 1925), quote from p. 13.

126. "Bericht über die am 10.4.24 stattgefundene Protestkundgebung der Münchener Katholiken," SAM/PD-6687.

127. Quotes from a speech by the aforementioned activist Born in "Kein Born der Weisheit," *Das Bayerische Vaterland* no. 54 (4 March 1924), and "Religionskrieg," *Bayerischer Kurier* no. 58 (27 February 1924).

NSDAP were frequently blamed by Ludendorff's followers for having been in essence "too Catholic" and having therefore contributed at least in part to the eventual Catholic sabotage of the *völkisch* cause.¹²⁸ These initial divisions would soon blossom into open animosity between Hitler and Ludendorff.

In early 1924 remnants of the former NSDAP in Munich made the decision to enter electoral politics for the first time, running in both the Landtag elections of April 1924 and the Reichstag elections of May and December 1924 as part of an amalgamation known as the "Völkischer Block," which problematically pledged its official loyalty to the leadership of both Hitler and Ludendorff.¹²⁹ One aspect of the Block's energetic electioneering was the attempt by certain former Nazis to maintain Catholic support, or at least to prevent or slow down a mass exodus of Catholics from the movement. The Catholic student Kleo Pleyer, who soon left the church and later achieved some fame as a Nazi historian, led the campaign for the Völkischer Block at the university. In attempting to counteract the influence of the anti-Catholic crusade by essentially denying its existence, Pleyer asserted that the *völkisch* movement was "not at all in conflict with the Catholic faith" and made the unconvincing claim that "the attempt to conjure up a new Kulturkampf did not originate from *völkisch* groups but rather from certain political parties that have laid claim to Catholicism as their hereditary right."¹³⁰ Quite different, however, and considerably more effective in pursuing the objective of keeping Catholics in the movement were the two mass meetings held in April 1924 on the theme "Can a Catholic be *völkisch*?" convened simultaneously in the Bürgerbräukeller and the Löwenbräukeller and organized by three lay Catholics who had been long-time members of the NSDAP, Hans Dauser, Max Sesselmann, and a lesser-

128. See for example the statement of Albrecht Hoffmann that "Hitler . . . failed because he did not recognize the immense danger of ultramontanism clearly enough;" Hoffmann, *Der 9. November*, 8. Hitler's otherwise hagiographic early biographer, the Protestant Georg Schott, agreed openly and, in looking back on NSDAP's more Catholic orientation before the Putsch, stated that "in [Hitler's] soul there was simply no room for consideration of such devilish [Catholic] trickery. He clearly recognized the Jewish treachery, but was not capable of the thought that the devil had crept into the eucharistic vessel (*Monstranz*) and was deceiving the childishly believing populace. He was not capable, that is, until life taught him this hard lesson. What level of pain this experience caused him, this sincere Catholic and deeply pious man (*ehrlichen Katholiken und von Herzen frommen Manne*), requires no further discussion"; Schott, *Das Völkischbuch von Hitler* (Munich, 1924), 165.

129. See especially Robert Probst, *Die NSDAP im Bayerischen Landtag 1924–1933* (Munich, 1998), 23–38; and Jablonsky, *The Nazi Party in Dissolution*, 54–57.

130. Pleyer's statements were made in an essay in *Deutsche Presse* 3 (January 1924) and quoted in "Kulturkampf," *Bayerischer Kurier* no. 33 (2 February 1924). On Pleyer's later career as an historian and leading Nazi figure, see Walter Frank's extended obituary published shortly after Pleyer was killed in action on the eastern front in 1942, "Kleo Pleyer: Ein Kampf um das Reich," *Historische Zeitschrift* 166 (1942): 507–53; Frank recounts Pleyer's *völkisch* student activism at the University of Munich during and following the Putsch in *ibid.*, 525–28.

known Nazi activist named Ferrari.¹³¹ The police observer present at the meeting in the Bürgerbräukeller noted an attendance of more than one thousand and recorded that Sesselmann, who "spoke for two full hours," protested the treatment of *völkisch* Catholics as "second-class Catholics" by the BVP press and stressed the Christian nature of the movement's "moral battle against the degeneration of the German national soul." Ferrari described how his own deep Catholic faith bolstered his commitment to the Nazi mission and emphasized the consistent support for the Catholic cause shown by Hitler, who had "never in his life made a single attack on religion or the church." In urging Catholics to remain in the movement, Ferrari asserted that the majority of believing Catholics still opposed the policies of the BVP, stating that "this is best illustrated when one visits Munich's churches on Sundays, where one will by no means merely find people from the Bavarian People's Party."¹³² In the end, the meeting yielded an impassioned and clearly-worded declaration of loyalty to the principle of "religious Catholicism," rejecting the anti-Catholic attacks of Ludendorff and his followers while pledging spiritual allegiance to the pope and Cardinal Faulhaber in unmistakably strong terms.¹³³

While these and other such electioneering efforts were remarkably successful initially, in the end they proved unable either to drown out the never-ending chorus of anti-Catholic contempt coming from Ludendorff's followers within the movement or to definitively stave off the reality of decline that became increasingly undeniable as the year progressed.¹³⁴ This development can be

131. These meetings were heavily covered in the press on all sides: see, e.g., the articles entitled "Kann ein Katholik völkisch sein?" *BK* no. 112 (25 April 1924), *Augsburger Postzeitung* no. 97 (26 April 1924), *Münchener Zeitung* no. 116 (26 April 1924), *Grossdeutsche Zeitung* no. 73 (28 April 1924).

132. Überwachung der Versammlung am 25.4.24 im Bürgerbräukeller, Thema: "Kann ein Katholik völkisch sein," SAM/PD-6687. Ferrari also launched into an extended personal testimonial: "I am a believing Catholic, but I first had much to work through. Events have constantly brought me back to the question: why [am I a Catholic]? I have wrestled with God, but I have persevered to arrive at my positive Catholic faith. Anyone who has to struggle in life will have to struggle with his faith. A doubter who has fought his way through becomes stronger than someone who has always been comfortable"; recounted in *Grossdeutsche Zeitung* no. 73 (28 April 1924).

133. "We Catholics of Munich (and of all the German-speaking territories) who belong to the *völkisch* movement are in no way waging a war against the cross, the symbol of Christianity, against the Catholic Church, against the Holy Father, or against our archbishop . . . We *völkisch* Catholics venerate in the Holy Father the honored *Oberhaupt* of our Church, which we esteem as standing above the nations, untroubled by the personal sentiments of individuals. We venerate in his Eminence, the Cardinal-Archbishop Dr. Faulhaber, our honorable shepherd (*unseren aufrechten Sprengelhirten*), whom we continue to recognize as standing above the parties"; reprinted in "Kann ein Katholik völkisch sein?" *Grossdeutsche Zeitung*, no. 73 (28 April 1924). The police report, which mentions but does not reproduce the text of the declaration, notes that it was opposed by only five votes, SAM/PD-6687.

134. *Völkisch* attacks on the Catholic Church continued unabated throughout the year; see the large folder in the Munich police files of related clippings that run into early 1925 entitled "Ludendorffs Einstellung zur katholischen Kirche," SAM/PD-6687.

traced in part by looking at the electoral fortunes of the Völkischer Block in Munich throughout 1924. In the Landtag elections of April 1924 the popularity of the movement (while perhaps largely residual) was still considerable, with the Block garnering 34.9 percent of the Munich vote — the largest total of any single party — before slipping to a still-impressive 28.5 percent in the Reichstag elections the next month.¹³⁵ At the same time, unmistakable signs of disillusion on the part of many *völkisch* Catholics were readily apparent within the movement throughout the spring of 1924.¹³⁶ The declining fortunes of the Völkischer Block then continued into free fall throughout the rest of the year, so that by the time of the new Reichstag elections in December 1924 its support had withered to a mere 9.1 percent. The once mighty movement had managed over the course of a few months to lose nearly three-fourths of its Munich constituency.¹³⁷ Importantly, the party would never regain its former level of Catholic support in Munich, and following the refounding of the NSDAP in early 1925 the stronghold of the Nazi movement in Bavaria would no longer be Catholic Munich and its environs, but rather Protestant Franconia.¹³⁸

135. The bulk of support for the Völkischer Block had come at the expense of the BVP (whose totals dropped from 31.7 percent in the previous Reichstag election [1920] to 21.9 percent in May 1924) and the SPD (which declined even more dramatically, from 39.2 percent in 1920 to 17.1 percent in May 1924). While the BVP losses flowed almost exclusively into the *völkisch* cause (the Bauernbund vote in Munich remained less than 2 percent and DNVP totals remained virtually constant between 1920 and May 1924), the SPD losses were also responsible for fueling the rapid growth of the KPD, whose vote totals more than doubled (from 7.2 percent in 1920 to 15.1 percent in May 1924); Thränhardt, *Wahlen*, 172–73. It would be interesting to speculate as to how many of Karl Heinrich Pohl's "Catholic socialists" (see n. 12 above) may have defected to the Nazi camp not only for its worker-oriented radicality but also for its religious rhetoric.

136. The bitterness felt by many *völkisch* Catholics toward the disastrous impact of Ludendorff and his followers was expressed quite articulately by Abbot Schachleiter in a letter to Oswald Spengler in late May 1924: "What a disaster for the German Fatherland! One could almost scream over this state of affairs! Haven't we already been brought low enough? Our *Volk* has never been so leaderless as it is today. Ludendorff has completely thrown away the support of German Catholics . . . God help us! May he grant us the strength to continue to work for our poor Fatherland"; Schachleiter to Spengler, 31 May 1924, in Spengler, *Briefe: 1913–1936* (Munich, 1963), 325.

137. Thränhardt, *Wahlen*, 173. It should also be noted that only a very limited number of Catholic defectors from the Völkischer Block in Munich went back to the BVP, whose mandate increased only slightly (from 21.9 percent in May to 23.7 percent in December). Many seem to have opted for the DNVP, which jumped from 12.3 percent of the Munich vote in May to 21.5 percent in December. Importantly, the DNVP was at this time energetically attempting to lure right-wing Catholics into its own *Katholiken-Ausschuss*, whose most prominent national figure was the Catholic historian (and later Nazi Reichstag delegate) Martin Spahn; see Gabriele Clemens, *Martin Spahn und der Rechtskatholizismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Mainz, 1983).

138. Despite Hitler's dogged insistence that Munich would always remain the *Hauptstadt der Bewegung*, from 1924 on this claim was primarily symbolic. Even as late as the elections of March 1933, when the Nazis were riding the wave of nationalistic fervor that accompanied Hitler's appointment as chancellor, electoral support for the NSDAP remained noticeably lower in Munich (37.8%) than in Germany more generally (43.9%); Thränhardt, *Wahlen*, 136.

Not only did huge numbers of Catholics abandon the movement in the course of 1924, but there is evidence that those who chose to remain in the movement often felt compelled to abandon their Catholic convictions as a result. It seems that Alfred Miller, for instance, who in numerous articles in the *Völkischer Beobachter* had earlier maintained the distinction between religious and political Catholicism, no longer viewed such a distinction as viable in the wake of the Putsch. In a widely-read pamphlet from January 1924 Miller condemned "Jesuitism" in such sweeping terms as to apply potentially to all believing Catholics and presented the relationship between Catholic and *völkisch* identity starkly as an either/or choice: "In these days it is to be decided which has the upper hand, the jesuitical-ultramontane [worldview] or the *völkisch* idea."¹³⁹ But perhaps the most instructive example of the abandonment of Catholic identity in favor of the *völkisch* cause is provided by Heinrich Himmler, who was born into a traditional and extremely religious Catholic household in Munich in 1900 — his father was a Gymnasium teacher and a personal tutor to the Wittelsbach royal family — and who grew to young adulthood as a devout Catholic. Numerous diary entries reflect the central role of communion, confession, and attendance at mass in shaping the rhythm of the young Himmler's daily life.¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, when the BVP was founded in November 1918, Himmler wrote to his family full of enthusiasm for the new party, proclaiming "Father, you must join the Bayerische Volkspartei, it is the only hope."¹⁴¹ While a student at the Technische Hochschule in Munich between 1919 and 1922, Himmler was scrupulous in fulfilling his religious obligations, although he was plagued by periodic doubts arising from his membership in an interconfessional student fraternity that practiced the *Mensur*

139. Alfred Miller, *Der Jesuitismus als Volksgefahr: Eine Betrachtung zu den Münchener Novemberereignissen* (Munich, 1924), 17. Miller clearly left the Catholic Church following the Putsch, and by the late 1920s was working closely with the antisemitic movement of the overtly anti-Christian Theodor Fritsch and his Hammer-Verlag in Leipzig; see, e.g., Miller's reworking and republication of Fritsch's famous *Geistige Unterjochung* (Leipzig, 1929) and Miller's own profoundly anti-Christian manifesto *Völkerentartung unter dem Kreuz* (Leipzig, 1936).

140. The only extended account of Himmler's early years remains Bradley F. Smith's all-too-brief *Heinrich Himmler: A Nazi in the Making, 1900–1926* (Stanford, 1971); Peter Padfield's more popular *Himmler: Reichsführer SS* (London, 1990) does not add much to the picture already established by Smith. There is much material on Himmler that is yet to be worked through; the important fragments of Himmler's diaries that were discovered after the Second World War are on deposit at the Hoover Institution in Stanford (see Werner T. Angress and Bradley F. Smith, "Diaries of Heinrich Himmler's Early Years," *Journal of Modern History* 31 [1959]: 206–24). Additionally, the *Collection Himmler* section of the NSDAP Hauptarchiv constitutes a treasure trove of further information on Himmler and his family background; see especially NSDAP-HA 98/fols. 1–9; 99/fols. 9–16; 17a/fol. 1; 18a/fol. 11.

141. Himmler to parents, 29 November 1918, NSDAP-HA 98/fol. 2. This letter is cited in a different context in Smith, *Himmler*, 59. Himmler was active in the BVP (even agitating on the party's behalf) at least through 1921.

(student dueling), which had been officially condemned by the church.¹⁴² As Himmler became increasingly involved in the local *völkisch* milieu during his student years, evidenced in part by his meticulously-kept reading list, which recorded a steadily increasing diet of *völkisch* and antisemitic texts, he was quite successful in reconciling this increased involvement with a continued commitment to his Catholic identity.¹⁴³ In the summer of 1923 Himmler was clearly caught up in the NSDAP's Catholic-oriented membership drive, and was almost certainly present at the St. Boniface memorial for Albert Leo Schlageter to hear the powerful eulogy given by Schachleiter.¹⁴⁴ Along with countless other young Catholic men in Munich who were similarly attracted to the party, Himmler officially joined the NSDAP in July or August 1923, receiving membership number 42404, and went on to participate actively in the Putsch in early November.¹⁴⁵ Himmler apparently struggled for several months after the Putsch in an extended attempt to reconcile his Catholic beliefs to the imperatives of continued membership in the *völkisch* movement. He continued to attend mass regularly in the early months of 1924 and eagerly soaked up the Catholic-oriented ideals represented by Dietrich Eckart and Hitler in *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin* soon after the book was published.¹⁴⁶ Yet at the same time Himmler was also coming increasingly under the influence of anti-Catholic ideas, reading works by such overtly anti-Christian writers as Ernst Haeckel around the same time he read *Der Bolschewismus*.¹⁴⁷ By the sum-

142. See Smith, *Himmler*, 87; Angress and Smith, "Diaries," 217. On Himmler's religious observance while a student see also Himmler's letter to his parents, 20 March 1920, NSDAP-HA 98/fol. 2.

143. Himmler's partial reading list from 1919 through the early 1930s, containing nearly 350 titles often with brief notes and responses, is contained in NSDAP-HA 18a/fol. 11. On Himmler's increasing involvement in various smaller groups within Munich's *völkisch* milieu between 1921 and 1923 see Smith, *Himmler*, 125–26, 131–33.

144. Several of the patriotic groups of which Himmler was a member, including the comparatively moderate grouping *Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände Bayerns*, mandated that their members attend the Schlageter demonstration on the Königsplatz; see VB no. 110 (8 June 1923). Himmler's almost certain attendance at the St. Boniface ceremony and the impact of the figure of Schlageter on his life are indicated by Himmler's central involvement in the *völkisch* festivities surrounding the one-year anniversary of Schlageter's death in May 1924. For instance, on the back of his personal *Ehrenkarte* for the largest of these Schlageter ceremonies (in the Bürgerbräukeller on 26 May 1924), Himmler recorded proudly: "Was present in uniform and carried the flag"; NSDAP-HA 98/fol. 1.

145. Bradley Smith misinterprets (in my opinion) Himmler's entrance into the NSDAP in the summer of 1923 as the almost accidental result of simply "stumb[ing] along" in the wake of the decision of the popular Ernst Röhm, leader of the Reichsflagge (one of several *völkisch* groups to which Himmler belonged), to join the NSDAP; Smith, *Himmler*, 134. On Himmler's (minor) role in the Putsch, see Gordon, *Putsch*, 345–46, and Smith, *Himmler*, 136.

146. On Himmler's continued attendance at mass, see for example his diary entries for 17–24 February 1924, cf. Angress and Smith, "Diaries," 217. In his reading list, Himmler noted next to the entry for *Der Bolschewismus* that he would "read this often" and that "it gives one perspective on all times and places"; NSDAP-HA 18a/fol. 11.

147. Interestingly, Alfred Miller's *Ultramontanes Schuldbuch: Eine deutsche Abrechnung mit dem*

mer of 1924, while Hitler was still in jail, Himmler had decided to join the Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei, one of the Nazi successor groups that oriented itself specifically around the figure of Ludendorff and was often in opposition to the Munich-based remnants of the NSDAP.¹⁴⁸ Not coincidentally, Himmler's diary entries indicate that he had ceased attending mass entirely by the summer of 1924 at the latest. Apparently feeling it no longer possible to reconcile his Nazi identity with the Catholic faith, Himmler would eventually, as is well documented, become an ardent critic of Christianity in general.¹⁴⁹



So, in the end, how "Catholic" was the early Nazi movement? It must be admitted that a definitive answer still remains elusive. Certainly the NSDAP made no claim to being a "Catholic" party in the sense of the claims made by the BVP and Center Party. Yet at the same time, it may well be that the confessional makeup of the Nazi movement — especially by the late summer of 1923 — was not all that different from the makeup of the BVP which, it should be noted, was also officially interconfessional. In any event, the activism of the NSDAP's prominent clerical spokesmen and the powerful image of Albert Leo Schlageter gave the movement, at least for a time, a strongly Catholic-oriented image whose contours stand out even more sharply in contrast to the anti-Catholic campaign that followed the Putsch. However, while there were certainly believing Catholics who remained ardent supporters of Hitler throughout the "wilderness years" and the Third Reich (and in many cases beyond), from the mid-1920s on there was simply no room for the presence or semblance of an active Catholic identity among the top leadership of the NSDAP, especially as the party's message became more and more totalizing and as the most visible party leaders from Catholic backgrounds — such as Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels — came to be not only strongly anti-Catholic but opponents of Christianity more generally.

Zentrum und seinen Hintermännern (Breslau, 1922) was the item immediately preceeding *Der Bolschewismus* in Himmler's reading list; NSDAP-HA 18a/fol. 11. Himmler recorded that he finished Haeckel's *Die Welträtsel* (Leipzig, 1919) on 9 February 1924 and was intrigued by it; however, his negative reaction to Haeckel's "denial of a personal God," which Himmler judged as "simply terrible," illustrates his continued attempt to hold on to his religious faith. The list also notes, however, that Himmler began reading the scurrilous Carl Friedrich von Schlichtegroll, *Ein Sadist im Priesterrock* (Leipzig, 1904), in late February 1924.

148. Smith, *Himmler*, 154; for more detail see, e.g., Peter Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (London, 1983), 35–37, and Jablonsky, *Nazi Party in Dissolution*, 85–92. As Gregor Strasser's personal secretary, Himmler officially came back into the refounded NSDAP in May 1925; Smith, *Himmler*, 158.

149. Angress and Smith, "Diaries," 217; Padfield, *Himmler*, 170–74; see also Wolfgang Dierker, *Himmlers Glaubenskrieger: Der Sicherheitsdienst der SS und seine Religionspolitik* (Paderborn, 2002), esp. 123–28.

It might also be asked what are the larger implications of Catholic influence on the early movement for our understanding of the Third Reich. One should, in this regard, resist the impulse to make too direct a connection between the nature of the Nazi regime in power and Catholic elements in the movement before 1924. Certainly the sacramental aspects and performative theatricality that later characterized the Nazi aesthetic, most famously in the annual party congresses in Nuremberg, have been traced to the residual presence of an essentially Catholic liturgical-ritual aesthetic.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the authoritarian leadership model and hierarchical structure of the Nazi state, as well as a larger vision of a Germanic European empire, have been connected to similar ideational patterns within a broader Catholic-authoritarian worldview.¹⁵¹ But these indisputably secularized phenomena represent only formal husks that had been hollowed out and emptied of any real Catholic or Christian content; if anything, the disembodied nature of whatever residual "Catholic" elements (visual or otherwise) that continued to shape the face of the Third Reich serve to bring into sharper focus the more genuinely Catholic influences that were evident in the early Nazi movement. In any case these elements had become, by the time Hitler came to power in 1933, little more than distant memories.

In the midst of the so-called wilderness years, however, as Hitler looked back on his movement's recent demise in an important but often-overlooked lament from the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, he pointed bitterly to the anti-Catholic crusade of Ludendorff and his followers as an unmistakable caesura: "The gentlemen who suddenly discovered in the year 1924 that the supreme mission of the *völkisch* movement was the fight against 'ultramontanism' have not crushed ultramontanism, but they have torn open the *völkisch* movement." In pledging to steer the NSDAP clear of such errors in the future, Hitler went on nostalgically to reminisce about the ultimate wisdom of the party's religious stance in the days before coming under the increased influence of Ludendorff in the fall of 1923:

It will always be the supreme duty of the leadership of the National Socialist movement to offer the keenest opposition to any attempt to put the movement at the disposal of such [confessional] fights, and instantly to drive the propagators of such a scheme from the ranks of the movement. And, in fact, down to the autumn of 1923 this was thoroughly done. The most believing Protestant could stand in the ranks of our movement next to the most believ-

150. For the impact of the Catholic rituals from Hitler's childhood on his aesthetic and political sensibilities, see Heer, *Glaube*, 21–24. See also, more generally, Richard Faber, "Politischer Katholizismus: Die Bewegung von Maria Laach," in *Religions- und Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Hubert Cancik (Düsseldorf, 1982), 136–58.

151. Bärsch, *Politische Religion*, esp. 26–31; Klaus Breuning, *Die Vision des Reiches*; Richard Faber, *Lateinischer Faschismus: Über Carl Schmitt, den Römer und Katholiken* (Berlin, 2001).

ing Catholic, without either having to come into the slightest conflict of conscience with his religious convictions . . . And this notwithstanding the fact that, in those very years, the movement fought most bitterly against the Center Party, not of course on religious grounds, but exclusively on questions of national, racial, and economic policy. Success proved us right then, just as today it proves the know-it-all's wrong.¹⁵²

Of course, what Hitler's selective memory would not allow him to recall (and what his ego could in any case never have admitted) was the fact that it was his own decision to join the Kampfbund in September 1923, in sacrificing the organizational independence of the NSDAP on the altar of a vain and premature attempt to seize power, that opened the NSDAP to the increased influence of Ludendorff and was ultimately responsible for the movement's loss of Catholic support in Munich. And what he may have sensed but could not yet have known was that this support would never fully be recovered. The space that had previously existed in which Nazi and Catholic identity could peacefully and even fruitfully coexist had largely disappeared in the flood of anti-Catholic invective that washed over the fractured movement in the wake of the failed Putsch, an early victim of Hitler's already massive political ambition.

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152. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston, 1939), 829.